

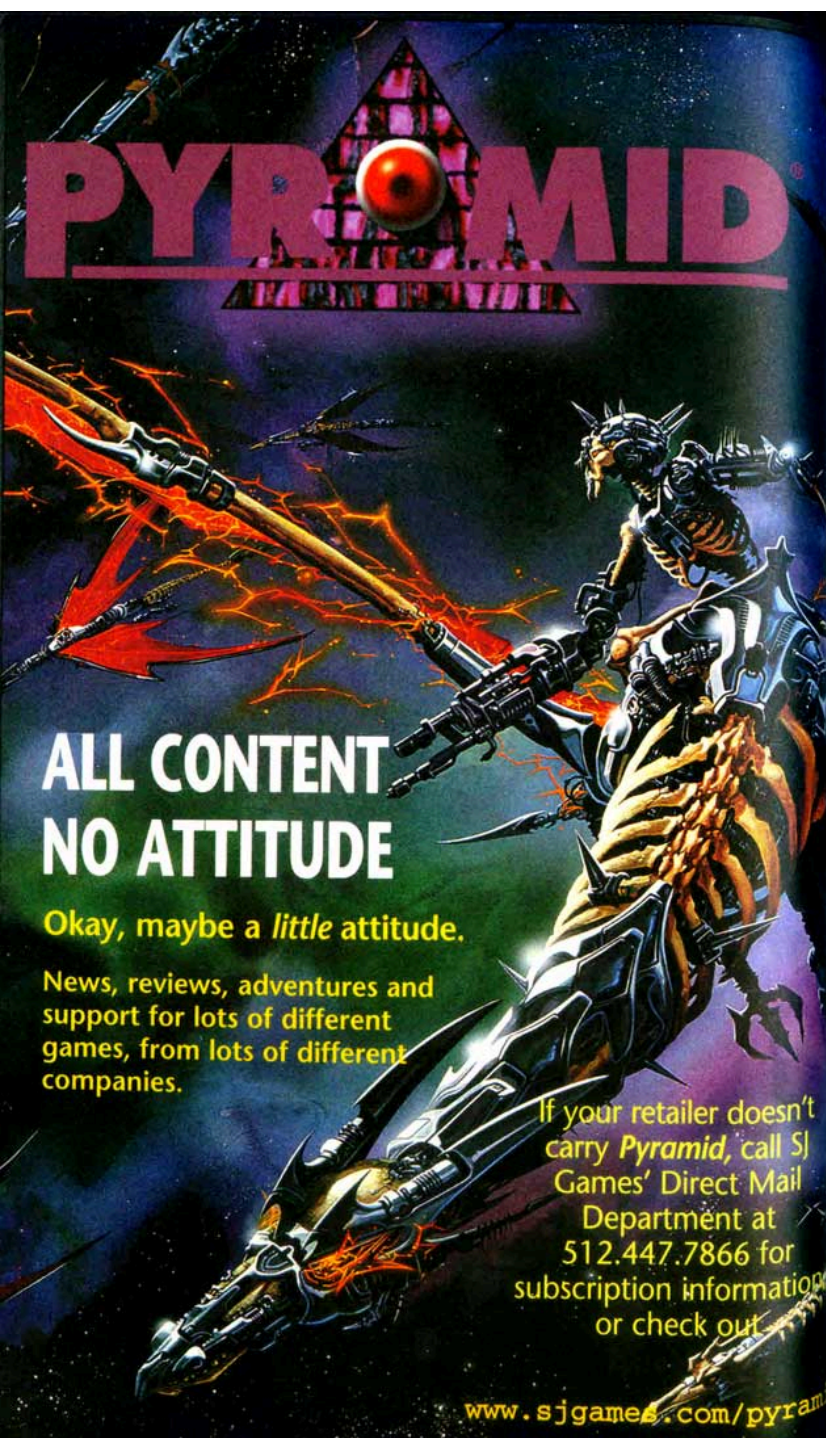
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ADMIRAL'S COMMUNIQUÉ



Change in Command

Star Wars Adventure Journal #14 will be my last. West End management has shifted me from editorial duties to administration and game design. Steve Miller—a former TSR editor and game designer—has already begun work on *Journal* #15 and beyond. He is a welcome *Star Wars* team member at West End and will continue maintaining the *Journal*'s high quality standards. No doubt I will still contribute some articles for the *Journal*, but I am turning the overall direction and day-to-day operations to Steve.

Since establishing the *Journal* in 1994, I've had the pleasure to work with many people toiling behind the scenes to make this project successful. I'd like to thank them. West End's Richard Hawran, Jeff Kent and Daniel Scott Palter have provided their support and much-needed encouragement. Timothy Zahn, Kathy Tyers and Michael A. Stackpole have supported the *Journal* with stories in which they return to the characters and galaxy they love. Up-and-coming authors have contributed articles which expand the *Star Wars* galaxy's scope and still live up to Lucasfilm's standards of excellence. Our loyal subscribers and readers have faithfully hunted down issues to fill out their collections and find the latest in *Star Wars* information. Lucasfilm's Sue Rostoni and Allan Kausch have guided the *Journal*'s growth and watched over continuity concerns. Bantam editors Tom Dupree and Pat LoBrutto opened many doors of opportunity.

And, of course, none of this would have been possible without the imaginative vision and perseverance of George Lucas. Through their involvement with the *Journal*, everyone—readers, authors, editors, and creators—has become part of the *Star Wars* dream.

Commander Peter Schweighofer
Admiral's Attaché
May 1997

STAR WARS®

Vol. 1, Issue 14

August, 1997

Adventure JOURNAL

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Adventure JOURNAL

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Special Thanks To: Barbara Hambly; Allan Kausch, Sue Rostoni, Julia Russo and Lucy Wilson, Lucasfilm Licensing; Daniel Scott Palter, Richard Hawran, and Jeff Kent, West End Games.

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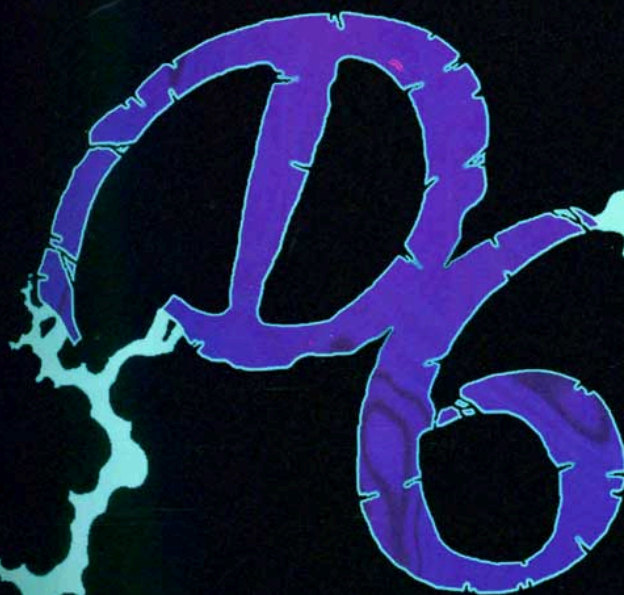
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Published by: West End Games • RR 3 Box 2345 • Honesdale, PA 18431

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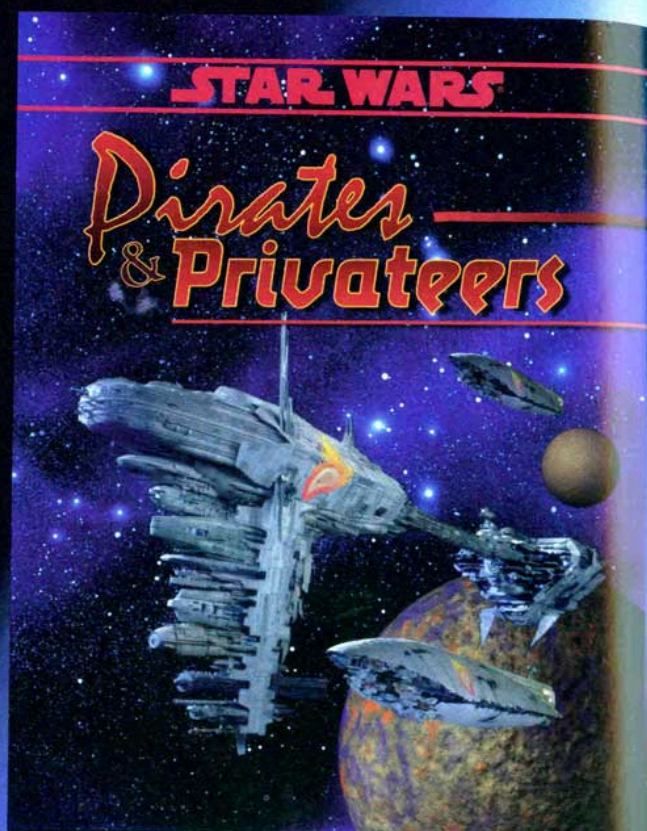
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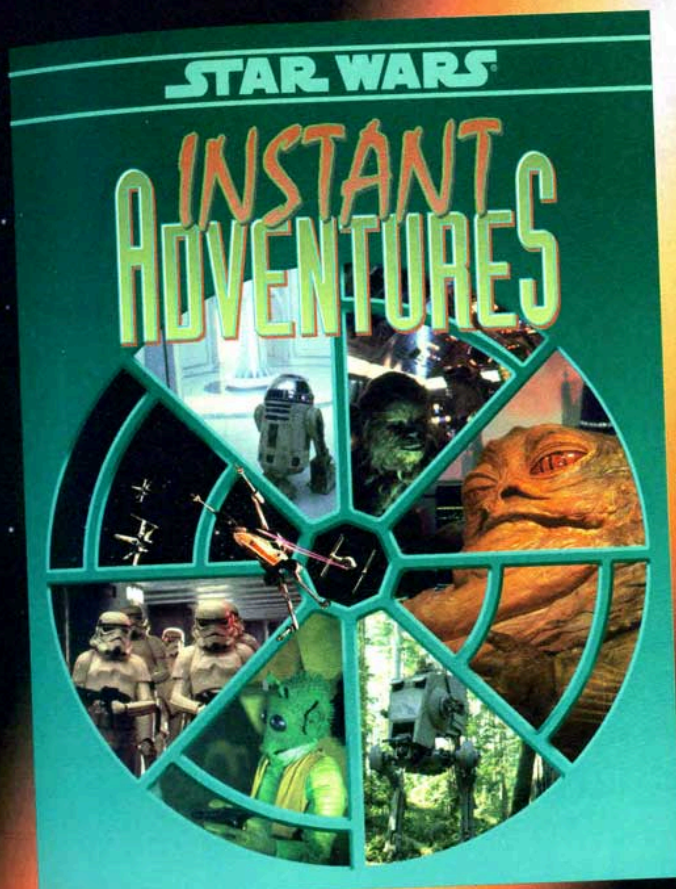
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STAR WARS
Adventure Journal • August 1997

STAR WARS
ADVENTURE

Murder in Slushtime

MURDER IN *Slushtime*

By Barbara Hambly

Illustrations by Doug Shuler

There were places in the galaxy more depressing than the planet Gamorr in slushtime. Callista Ming had even been to some of them.

Kirdo III in the summer, with the air temperature in the low one-hundreds and nothing to do between 400 kilometer-per-hour sandstorms but watch the inhabitants of the dunes wait for slugs to crawl into their mouths.

The garbage-moon of Shesharile VI when the first spring heat activates the bacteria in the underground waste-sinks.

Kessel, at any time.

But Gamorr in slushtime came close.

"Still no break in the weather?" Callista came three-quarters of the way down the metal stair from the upper deck of the freighter *Zicreex*, then swung herself lightly over the rail, dropping the remaining meter and a half to the metal deck.

Jos, the ship's engineer and the only other human in the crew, half emerged from under the console where he was digging out flakes of the pus-colored fungus that had sprouted there overnight. "No."

"And no word from Guth?" Callista tossed the plastene-wrapped parcel of assorted growths she'd scraped from the walls of her

cubicle down onto the Captain's chair. Captain Ugmush had spoken of making fug for dinner that night, to take advantage of their presence on her homeworld. There was nothing, she said, like the molds of home.

"No," said Jos again, and went back to scraping. When Callista first began traveling on the *Zicreex*, she'd thought Jos's impregnable gloom stemmed from being a slave on a freighter owned and operated by Gamorreans—enough to depress anyone. After six months, however, she had come to the conclusion that the scar-faced, stringy engineer would have been gloomy had he been the independent potentate of the best-stocked and most enthusiastically peopled Pleasure Planet in the Purple Systems. She fully intended to find some way of freeing him before she parted company with the ship, but doubted it would make a whit of difference.

As Callista walked to the open airlock door to regard the sodden vista of slowly thawing snow that lay between the *Zicreex* and the walls of the small clanhold of Nudskutch, Jos added, "The weather should clear for good in a week or so. The Fair at Bolgoink starts tomorrow; the big one over in Jugsmuk is next week, with traders coming in from all over this part of the continent. We should be restocked and gone in ten days."

He didn't sound particularly enthusiastic, about either the start of the planet's fair season or the prospect of departure. Callista went to the outer door and stood with one shoulder leaned against the jamb, the murky breeze lifting her long, rough, light-brown hair back from her face. Around the *Zicreex*, the makeshift landing-field was vacant and mostly flooded still. Unprepossessing as it was, Gamorr in slushtime was preferable to imprisonment in the gunnery computer of an abandoned Imperial dreadnought, a disembodied consciousness slowly deteriorating into less than a ghost. Freedom had cost Callista her ability to use the Force—the very core of her personality as a Jedi Knight. It had cost her other things as well.

But still, she thought, touching the lightsaber that hung at her belt, it was very good to be free.

Captain Ugmush appeared from the woods, a huge sack of fungus on her back, and two of the three boars who constituted the Gamorrean freighter-crew trotting docilely at her heels. The third, Ugmush's husband, came behind, patiently herding a ring of snoruuk in the direction of the ship's ramp, an exercise that could take the remainder of the afternoon. Ugmush strode briskly up the ramp, a

middle-aged sow resplendent in a garish offworld glory of eyepaint and diamond nose-rings. Her long hair was dyed bright pink and half a dozen morrts—the Gamorrean parasite with which the *Zicreex* was infested—in evidence, clinging to her glabrous arms, bosom and neck.

"Stew tonight," she informed Callista, and reached back to rip aside the mold-tendrill that had snaked out of the sack and was trying to get a grip on her throat. "Teach you make stew." Owing to the difficulty Gamorreans have in pronouncing Basic, Ugmush wore a transliterator around her neck, which produced a mostly accurate rendering of her words in the honey-sweet, throaty purr of holovid star Amber Jevanche.

She prodded Callista in the ribs. "Skinny v'lch," she added reprovingly—the transliterator fumbling for and not finding a translation of the word for an unmarried sow. "Not find husband, all skinny. Morrts can't live on skinny. Feed you. Make you...."

The transliterator made another stab at the appropriate word in Basic, then gave it up with a tinny rattle. Ugmush flexed her biceps and pecs to demonstrate. "*Gweek*. You know *gweek*?" She picked one of the thumb-sized gray parasites out of her hair, held it to her shoulder where it could get a better purchase. Her pale, yellowish flesh was dotted with the scabs of their bites.

"*Gweek*. Good husband; two tuskers; nine morrts." She slapped her chest proudly. "*Gweek*."

"*Gweek*," repeated Callista gravely. During her travels on the *Zicreex* Callista had learned a good deal of Gamorrean, a tongue impossible to master for anyone with the slightest pretension to dignity.

"Next week, fair at Jugsmuk, we buy food." Ugmush grabbed a handful of fungus that was trying to climb out of her sack and shoved it back in.

One of the tusker boars—lesser members of the crew—who had come up the ramp at Ugmush's heels, frowned at the word Jugsmuk and pointed out, in Gamorrean, [Fair at Bolgoink tomorrow.] Eyes brightening visibly, he added, [See Guth fight in tourney.]

Ugmush whirled with a savage squeal and caught him a swipe with one hand that sent him smashing into the wall. What she said to him was at a volume and a speed that rendered it incomprehensible to Callista, who could only deal with Gamorrean if it was spoken slowly and distinctly, but she caught the name of the Bolgoink clanhold and a lot of negatives and emphatics before the

Captain went storming up the metal ladder into the upper regions of the ship.

The tusker got to his feet, rubbing the bloody place on his jaw with an expression more of aggrieved anxiety than of anger. He looked to Callista for explanation: [Guth Ugmush brother,] he said. [Guth one of crew. Why not see fight?]

To herself, quietly, in Basic, Callista replied, "Because she knows he's going to die."

A fury of squeals and shrieks went up outside. Callista turned, sprang to the airlock door, the two tuskers crowding after and leaning out in such a way that she couldn't have shut it had she wanted to. Across the vacant, sodden landing-field a boar was running, knees and arms pumping, the calf-deep water of the puddles surging and splashing around him in holocausts of spray. Callista cried "Guth!" recognizing him, and the tuskers, seeing their Captain's younger brother being hotly pursued by at least a dozen armed boars, let out shrill grunts of delight, grabbed weapons, and pounded down the ramp to his rescue. A moment later Ugmush came running, war-club in one hand and blaster in the other, firing as she ran.

Like most Gamorreans she was a truly terrible shot. Steam belched and spewed as the white-hot plasma touched water and mud, and Callista, with horrible visions of a wild shot taking out the *Zicreex's* heat-exchangers, sprang down the ramp also. They'd been stranded on Travnin for two weeks not too long ago as a result of Ugmush's shooting and she had no intention of letting it happen again.

Callista yelled "URRJSH!" at the top of her lungs—Gamorrean for *Stop!*—as she easily outdistanced Ugmush and her crew. She unhooked the lightsaber from her belt as she ran and activated it in a flash of cold yellow brilliance. Guth reached her moments before the pursuing boars would have seized him: she took the iron heads off two halberds and a war-club, and opened a thin, smoking slit in the arm of the leading boar. It stopped their attack, rather to her surprise—she'd seen Gamorreans take on buzz-droids without a second thought for life or limb—and the next instant she whirled and brandished her lightsaber at Ugmush, who was about to hurl herself into the attackers and re-start the fray. "Get back!"

Ugmush skidded to a stop in a huge spray of mud. "Put that down!" She made to get past Callista, and Callista stepped again in her path, lightsaber still raised. The boars of the *Zicreex's* crew



collided with one another and all piled into Ugmush from the back. It took a few minutes to get everyone sorted out, while Guth stayed close at Callista's side, panting and spent from his run.

[What is this?] she asked him in Gamorrean. [Who are these? Why did you return?]

[Need help,] panted Guth, in labored Gamorrean. [Vrokk. The tourney....]

[Did you fight Vrokk?] The young boar didn't look as if he'd been in even tourney combat with the most feared and powerful clan boar and warlord in the southeastern part of the continent—certainly not the combat to the death that boars faced when one challenged another for the right to wed a clan matron sow. [Win Kufbrug to wife?]

Ugmush shoved past Callista to seize her brother in a bone-

breaking embrace. For a moment they rubbed snouts and licked faces in greeting, then Ugmush demanded, [Vrokk dead?]

[Vrokk dead.] Guth's voice was very quiet and there was fear in his bright-blue eyes. He gestured at the armed boars who had pursued him, some of them bearing the badge, Callista now saw, of Rog, warlord of Nudskutch, others in the dark-blue tabards of the Clan of Bolgoink. [Not fight,] said Guth. [Murder. They say I did it.]



On the way to the Hold of Bolgoink, Guth explained as well as he was able the seriousness of the charge. [Battle good. Mating-fight good. Murder bad.]

It made sense, Callista reasoned. The incessant fighting among the Gamorrean boars ensured that only the physically strongest would mate, the ratio of boars to sows being approximately ten to one at birth. Murder was cheating. Murder was survival of the sneakiest, not the fittest.

The only problem was the arresting boars had seemed to be under the impression that Ugmush and her crew had something to do with the killing as well. [Soap-eating scabwit I was here!] Ugmush had screamed at their captain. [How could I do murder if I was here?]

The boar had cogitated on that one for a time, profoundly puzzled. At last he'd said, [Vrokk's brother Rog say, murder from—from starship. You in starship. Everybody in starship. Rog have vengeance, on Guth, on you, on everybody. All of you die.]

Bolgoink Hold lay at the center of vast fields, forest and pasture, a walled and moated fortress of squat stone towers and longhouses, surrounded in turn by a sizeable village, likewise walled with stone. Outside the gates merchants from other clans were setting up the tents for Bolgoink Fair, but there was an uneasy hush over the place, and as they trudged past the half-constructed flies and marquees, Callista saw a number of sows loading up their goods again onto wagons, litters and wheelbarrows, preparatory to mov-

ing on to Jugsmuk. Vrokk had been a warlord of enormous power. Too many other warlords were waiting to see what would happen following his death.

The household guard met them within the gates of the hold's inner fortress, led by a rather thin but extremely scarred boar with a gold ring in his ear. Guth whispered to Callista, [Lugh. Second warlord.] It did not escape Callista that the scarred boar's yellow eyes followed Guth with suspicion and hate; she wondered if Lugh had had thoughts of challenging Vrokk's strength himself, of trying to win the matron Kufbrug's hand.

Kufbrug, the matron of the Bolgoink clan, received them in the round tower hall. She sat cross-legged on a huge wallow of loosely-stuffed crimson cushions, while the children she had borne last spring ran squealing and shrieking around the hall under the guardianship of a stolid-looking veteran boar with a wooden leg and a missing arm. Had she been standing, Kufbrug would have topped Callista's hundred and eighty centimeters, and massed well over two hundred kilos. Her greenish-brown hair hung in braids past her massive hips, strung with green and gold trade-beads; more beads glittered dully on her eight enormous breasts. More morrts than Callista had ever seen on a single Gamorrean clung, sucking contentedly, to her shoulders, biceps, neck, jowls.

A gweek sow and no mistake.

And yet there was something wrong. Slushtime, the closing weeks of the harsh Gamorrean winter, was, Callista knew, a time of preparation for sowing, a time of readying the boars for spring training, a time of bustle and spring-cleaning, of gathering the fungus that was so plentiful in these damp weeks, of pickling, weaving and sharpening tools. The energy that was Ugmush's leading characteristic, the hallmark of the Gamorrean sows, was absent from this giant matron. When Kufbrug raised her curiously long lashes and met Guth's eyes over the crossed halberds of the guards, there was only a deadness, an infinite grieving weariness, in the glittery yellow eyes.

On the cushions beside her sat her daughter Gundruk, matron of the much smaller hold of Nudskutch, and on Gundruk's other side, huge and dark and terrible, stood Rog, Vrokk's brother and Gundruk's husband, warlord of Nudskutch.

It was Rog who spoke, jerking a heavy, clawed hand at Callista, and at Jos the engineer who stood, still chained, between Ugmush and her tuskers. "Muh," he cried—outlander—and turned to

Gundruk, to Kufbrug, to the three or four scholar sows sitting quietly in the background, the guardians of the clanhold laws. [What more proof you need, that Guth use outlander poison to kill my brother? See his sister, captain of an outlander ship! See how there are outlanders among his sister's clan!]

Ugmush threw herself at Rog, screaming invective—"Sithfestering slime-eater how dare you...?" crooned Amber Jevanche's voice out of the transliterator—backed by her husband and both her tuskers regardless of the fact that all were chained and none bore weapons. Callista, who had refused to give up her lightsaber or allow herself to be chained for either the journey or the audience, simply stepped back out of the way. Though she felt a pang of loyalty for her crewmates—especially poor Jos, who was chained between the two tuskers and hauled along willy-nilly into the melee—she reflected that in a way having them out of the hall would make matters a lot easier.

When the prisoners had been hauled away and the hall had quieted down again, Callista lowered her lightsaber and stepped towards the dais again, tall, slim and a little awkward-looking among the stocky, porcine Gamorreans.

[Outlanders in their ships come to



Gamorr all the time], she said reasonably. [Many outlanders live at Jugsmuk Station. Outlanders hate Vrokk for other reasons?]

Rog looked back at Gundruk for help on that one. The guards scratched their heads at such complicated sophistry and regarded Callista with suspicion. Kufbrug only stroked the morrts clinging to her arms and stared away into the cold shadows of the room without interest.

[Guth did not want to fight. Vrokk was strong.] Gundruk rose to her feet, smaller than Kufbrug—younger, darker, and less *gweek*. [He killed my mother's last husband in tourney challenge, and his

strength was much renowned. Guth knew he could not win.] She took from the bosom of her embroidered gown a crumpled and folded hunk of parchment. [Vrokk had this in his hand when he was found, lying in his room with blood on his snout and in his mouth.]

Callista unfolded it. Large black runes spelled out a couple of lines: *[I will not meet you in the tourney fair, like two tuskers scuffling over a mushroom.]* Gundruk read along, tracing the runes with her heavy, curving nail. *[Neither is the hour appointed to my liking. Meet me rather on the high ground behind the snoruuk pastures at sunrise. Bring with you as many guards as*



you want. I have no fear of you. Guth.] She tapped the signature, then the seal, a heavy glob of dark-blue wax, cracked across where Vrokk had broken it to unfold the letter. [See? Outlander poison was here, under the seal. It flew up into his nose and destroyed his brain.]

Callista turned the parchment over in her hands. The brittle, cured leather under the seal was indeed stained greenish brown, and when she turned over the broken halves of the seal itself she saw that they were slightly hollowed, as if the hot wax had been dripped over something underneath. She fitted her thumb into the hollow, shut her eyes, emptied her thoughts and breathed.

Groping to touch the Force with her mind, as long ago her teacher had shown her. As long ago, in another body, she had so easily done.

But all she sensed was a deep evil, and the recurring thought that she would, after all, be justified in whatever she chose to do to these sloven, ugly beings, because they had dared raise their hands against her and those under her protection. They had, after all, done evil first.

Callista pulled her mind away. *Yes, she thought. Yes. The Lost Jedi defending her friends with the Force.*

She turned the parchment over in her hands again. [Anyone can sign Guth's name,] she said.

Gundruk turned to her mother and held out her hand. With great weariness, Kufbrug brought from the tassled pouch at her belt three more packets of parchment, thickly folded, and sealed as the note had been sealed with blue wax. Gundruk in turn handed them to Callista. [Love-poems,] she said. [See? Runes made same way. Name written same.] Her heavy lips lifted back from her tusks with loathing. [Guth.]

The oldest of the scholar sows stood and said, [This Guth has sent poems to Lady Kufbrug for many seasons now. Vrokk spoke of it often, with anger. It is true also, *V'ich Muh...*]—literally, Outlander Girl—that Lady Gundruk, and Lugh, and others of the household have heard the spirit of Vrokk moving about at night in the room in which he died. Spirits only walk if murder was done.]

Callista, who had been examining the imprint of minute bubbles in the wax, raised her head sharply at that, cold panic lancing through her that had nothing to do with the spirits of murdered souls: [Is the room locked?]

The scholar sows exchanged a glance. It was Kufbrug who spoke,

her voice very deep, slow and infinitely weary. [Yes, Outlander Girl. The room is locked.]

[Good,] said Callista, slowly and carefully, fearful suddenly that there be no mistake about what she said. [Keep room locked. Let no one in. Not until I come back. May I take this away with me?] She held up the note.

Gundruk and Rog exchanged a glance, puzzled—clearly they'd envisioned Callista as a prisoner, too—but Kufbrug said, [You may, if it will help you, Outlander Girl.]

"I think it will." Callista bowed in a rough equivalent of the Gamorrean obeisance, though Kufbrug had gone back to stroking her morrts, and stowed the parchment in her belt. The most interesting thing on the document was, of course, the seal, but the second most important thing was Guth's signature. As far as Callista knew, Guth, like most boars, could not write.



It was almost a day's walk to Jugsmuk Station, a grubby agglomeration of moss-crusted offplanet pre-fabs built up around the walls of the Jugsmuk clan fortress. The matron of Jugsmuk had years ago invested her labor in clearing and paving a good landing-field—good for Gamorr, anyway—and as a result, Jugsmuk Fair was one of the liveliest and most profitable on the continent of Wugguh. Not only clan boars and traders came in the spring to exchange foodstuffs and weaponry, to hold tourney fights and arrange marriages, but offworlders arrived as well bearing products far beyond the planet's crude resources.

No ships reared against the dark sky as Callista came out of the woods, wet and chilled with the sleet that had fallen all day, but Ugmush had told her there were a number of permanent outlanders living at the Station. A week or so early, thought Callista—the atmospheric chaos of winter was still making landings difficult. The *Zicreex* had orbited for a week before a temporary lull permitted landing, and Guth had been in a panic the whole time for fear he'd

miss his chance to challenge Vrokk at the Bolgoink Fair. Jugsmuk Fair was, indeed, timed to begin with the clearing of the atmosphere and the advent of the first of the trader ships.

It didn't take Callista long to find the individual she sought in Jugsmuk. She'd guessed already there wouldn't be more than one.

"Ugmush-Guth, yes," said Sebastin Onyx, smiling a little as he cleared off a battered red leather chair for Callista to sit. "Can I make you a tisane? I hate slushtime." He switched over the powerline from the music system to the cooker and set a small white pot of water under the disc. The sleet that had blown all day hammered

fitfully on the room's wide transparisteel port, blurring the darkening vision of the street outside. The room smelled of mold-guard, molds and pittins—at least five of the soft-furred little carnivores dozed near the heater, the only way, Callista guessed, of keeping morrts at bay. "You're a friend of his?"

"I've been a crewhand on the *Zicreex* with him for six months."

"And you're in port?" Onyx measured

"Well," grinned Onyx, "I admit there's only so much you can do in Gamorrean."

out leaves and herbs into a silver strainer and carefully poured the heated water through. "Did he challenge Vrokk at the Bolgoink Fair? I've never met him," he added, with a quick grin. "But he subspaced me whenever he had the credits for one of my poems—and frankly, a couple of times I gave him cut rates.... It's a living." He gestured around him at the little room.

Onyx was younger than Callista had expected, an impoverished student rather than the broken-down drunkards one frequently encountered in this particular economic niche. He was probably of Coruscant or Alderaan stock, shorter than she, fair-haired, and a

little shy, his large, blue shortsighted eyes blinking out from beneath the rims of a huge pair of vision-augmenters that he'd pushed up onto his forehead. "I work as a protocol liaison most of the year, but when everything locks down in winter, it's sometimes hard to make ends meet. Fortunately winter is when the boars can't get out and fight one another either, so they get all cozy and pleasant—they really do—and write songs and poems to their sows. Or, they hire *me* to write songs and poems."

"Songs?" Callista struggled to assimilate with a straight face the thought of Rog, or the snaggy-eared Lugh, serenading the massive Kufbrug by moonlight.

"Well," grinned Onyx, "I admit there's only so much you can do in Gamorrean. I did the same thing for some Bith for a season. Now, *there's* an unpromising tongue for the expression of the tenderer passions."

Regretfully, Callista bypassed the enticing speculation of languages less apt even than Bith—did Defel have love poetry? Did Givin?—and inquired instead, "Did you get a customer in asking for this letter?"

She held it out. Onyx nodded immediately. "Yes, five days ago. He said he was a friend of Guth's. Guth had told me he was going to challenge Vrokk, so I assumed.... Was there a problem?" He looked genuinely concerned.

"Sort of. Could you recognize the boar who came for it?"

"No. It was night, for one thing, and since I have a choice between lighting and heating—" He gestured to the single overloaded power-outlet—"I generally use oil-lamps or candles once it gets dark. Also, he wore a hood up around his face."

"What color wax did you seal it with?"

"I didn't," said Onyx. "Usually I seal Guth's with blue." He nodded at the basket of woven poltroop leaves on the table near the door, which contained a dozen or more stubs and sticks of sealing wax. "But he said no, he'd seal it later."

And the easiest thing in the world, thought Callista, would be to pocket a stub of wax out of that basket on one's way out.

"If someone wanted to purchase a poison, or some kind of off-world creature—a dangerous creature, like a spor crawler or a sovra—who would he go to in town?"

Onyx' face clouded. "There's two or three," he said. "Smugglers transport those things on spec, you know."

"I know." This had been the case thirty years ago, even under the

iron hand of Palpatine's New Order, and according to Han Solo the situation hadn't changed much. There were always those who blithely justified the hideous risks of alien infestation with phrases like "free market demand" and "if I didn't bring them in, someone else would" and "What, do you think I'm an amateur? I know what I'm doing!" Planetary economies had been crippled, civilizations destroyed, and literally billions of sentient beings destroyed by some smuggler saying, and truly believing, "Oh, they're really a lot safer than they look."

"Jabdo Garrink is one," said Onyx. "He's a Rodian. Sinissima Bel, but she hasn't stopped here since last summer. Gethnu Cheeve, a Devaronian. There was a clearing in the atmosphere a little while ago, you remember, so both Garrink and Cheeve were in town at the time I wrote that note." It hadn't taken him long, Callista noticed, to figure out that something was wrong.

"Does somebody around here have an enzymer?" Most interstellar merchants did, a necessary precaution if one were going to dwell on an alien world, much less in a spaceport with substances coming in constantly from who-knows-where, possibly adulterated with who-knows-what. Onyx directed her downstairs, to the bar-keep of the Irrational Number, a brisk little Bith who possessed not only an enzymer but a Registry bank program that wasn't more than a decade out of date. It told Callista what she needed to know about what it was that had been under that seal.

The knowledge brought her no elation however; only a sickened dread that remained with her as she made certain purchases in the grubby Jugsmuk emporia of interstellar goods. It was a dread that sat on the pillow of her rented room like the shadow of nightmare through the dark hours, and followed her, through the day-long slosh through knee-deep, freezing ooze, back to Bolgoink Hold.



Callista reached Bolgoink long after dark, half-frozen from the bitter tail-end of winter weather and exhausted from the effort of keeping the small team of dwoobs she'd hired to drag her pur-

chases from wandering away into the woods. She understood now why Gamorreans usually walked wherever they went, and carried their burdens in wheelbarrows.

In the courtyard she unloaded her purchases and wrangled the big squares of metal up the shallow stone steps to the main tower; one of the household veterans emerged from the longhouse and helped her, something it would never have occurred to one of the more aggressive and status-conscious tuskers to do.

[Guth and Ugmush all well?] she asked

The veteran belched assent. [Rog not happy, he said. Rog say, fight and kill Guth, fight and kill Ugmush, fight and kill you, then go home.] Like most veterans he was missing a couple of limbs, but was surprisingly handy with those he had left. [You fight Rog?]

[Not if I can help it,] Callista said. [Vrokk's room still haunted?]

Dinner was in progress in the main hall as they passed through, a sight worth seeing if one had a strong stomach and a low sense of humor. Since it was absolutely unthinkable that anyone in a Gamorrean household eat alone, Guth, Ugmush, Ugmush's crew and even Jos were present, securely chained to the trough among the minor household boars. Guth saw Callista and waved gallantly, a gesture of great self-sacrifice considering the share of victuals that break in attentiveness cost him: Callista felt deeply touched and honored.

[Still haunted,] agreed the veteran with another belch, as they wrestled their burdens down the upstairs corridor to the square tower room Vrokk had occupied. [Noises at night very loud, very bad. Vrokk spirit very angry.]

As well he should be, thought Callista, with sudden anger for the sake of anyone, no matter who, bereft of life's joy and life's light.

And the next second her heart leaped to her throat at the sight of a dark, heavy shape standing before the thick oak slabs of the chamber door. "Get away from there!" she cried, and then, recollecting her Gamorrean, [Don't go in!]

The massive head turned. The uncertain torchlight from the stairway gleamed on the gold earring, the network of scars.

[Not afraid of spirits,] grunted Lugh. [Not even spirit of Vrokk. Brave. Strong. Gweek. Look—seven morrts.] He held out his arm to demonstrate how many parasites his body could support. [This morrt, Kufbrug give me herself.]

[Gweek,] agreed Callista. [But still it is not good to enter the room. Kufbrug has said so.]

Lugh rumbled deep in his snout and strode off down the corridor. Callista stepped close to the door and pressed her ear to the planks. For a moment no sound came from within. Then, very softly, she heard a faint dry beating, like sheets of plastene or very fine metal whipping in a low wind. The sound should have been com-

forting—at least it was still in there—except for the horrible impression she had of size.

Callista sent the veteran off to fetch the rest of her purchases and stack them in the corridor beside the door, but she herself remained there, sitting on the floor with her back to the planks, for what was left of the night.

When day was fully come she unbarred the door and went in. The first

thing she saw was a bowl, set on the floor a meter or so into the room, containing a sticky residue of what appeared to be day-old blood. Otherwise the room was apparently as it had been four mornings ago when members of the household had found Vrokk's body. Wide windows opened on two sides of the room, covered with shutters and heavy curtains, as she had observed all windows in the Hold were at night. They admitted a diffuse brownish daylight, and though Callista knew that even such dimness rendered the haunted chamber perfectly safe, she hastened to fling both curtains and shutters wide.

No evidence spoke of struggle or death-throes. Vrokk's weapons—war-ax, halberd, and a variety of spiked clubs—hung untouched on the wall. The scraps and strips of dwoob-skin on the floor were stained a little with blood, but unrumpled. It could be, thought Callista, that the place had been tidied after the body had been removed. Certainly the huge patches of fungus and mold so common in slushtime were mostly gone from the walls. When she checked the lamp on the table—a bowl of poltroop-seed oil with a wick run through its lid—she saw that it was entirely empty, the lid

[The creature itself can be made to tell us who truly sent the letter.]

smoked and scorched a little where the wick had guttered out.

She brought in her packages, and closed the door behind her. She unwrapped what she had bought with her entire six months' wages on the *Zicreex*: forty-two meter-square panels of agrinium, the lightweight metal coating used to repair solar sails; two large rolls of agrinium stripping; several boxes of quad-strength adhesive dots; and an observation-cage wrought of thick metal mesh. She assembled the cage first, installing it in the corner of the chamber closest to the windows. The agrinium she used to thoroughly plate the corner of the room most nearly opposite the windows—walls, floor, and ceiling—where the morning sunlight would strike brightest.

The chamber was big, easily ten meters long by nearly seven wide.

This is not, thought Callista, going to be easy. But as far as she could see it was the only means of getting the information she needed.

She took a deep breath, touched for reassurance the lightsaber that hung at her belt, and left the room, latching the door behind her. Then she went in search of Kufbrug.

The Clan Matron of Bolgoink lay in the tower's main hall, motionless in a great ruck of mildew-covered cushions. Callista halted in the doorway, disconcerted by the matron's stillness. Even at supper last night she had only lain there, bleakly watching the others in the hall, when most Gamorrean widows had advertisements up for new husbands before the previous officeholders' bodies were cold.

But Kufbrug only raised her huge head and regarded Callista across the empty space of the chamber with yellow malevolent eyes. Callista remembered that tomorrow was the day when Rog would meet Guth in combat to avenge his brother. And when Guth was killed—as he certainly would be, for Rog, like his brother had been, was an enormous and powerful boar—it was anybody's guess what the status of Callista, Ugmush, and the crew of the *Zicreex* would be.

She had intended to speak of the combat, but something prompted her to ask instead, *[Is it well with you?]*

The dark-fringed nostrils flared. *[It is never well with me in slushtime.]* Kufbrug looked down and stroked with huge tender fingers the round little back of the morrt that clung, drinking, to her arm. *[The days are dark. Nor has it been well, since Guth came to*

challenge Vrokk for my hand. I told him to leave, that it was no use. What did you find in your journey, Outlander Girl? That no outlander hated Vrokk, because he would not have anything to do with them?]

Callista shook her head, then remembered that headshakes meant nothing to Gamorreans and made the chin-thrust-and-grunt that signified "No," something that brought an unwilling, rumbling chuckle to the sow and a sudden flicker of amused life to the dead eyes. She went on, [But I have found the means by which Vrokk was killed. Not a poison, but an outlander creature that was frozen in a piece of ice, until the heat of the sealing-wax melted the ice even as it shut it in. When the seal was broken, it flew up into Vrokk's nostril and killed him.]

[Poison or outland-creature, it is Guth's name on the letter, signed as he always signed,] she responded dully. [Rog will not forgo his vengeance.]

Callista knelt on the floor beside her, took the parchment from her jacket pocket, and wrote on the back the runes for GUTH. [Does this make me Guth?]

Kufbrug's fingers stilled on the morrt, and she cogitated on that one for a time, studying the signature. For a moment enlightenment flickered in the cold jonquil eyes, replaced almost at once by despair. [Rog will not understand this. Who would write Guth's name but Guth? Rog will avenge his brother.]

[The creature remains in the room where Vrokk was found,] said Callista. Gamorrean sows were infinitely smarter than the boars—it was perfectly possible that Rog wouldn't grasp the concept of forgery, but would only repeat stubbornly that he wanted vengeance. [And the creature itself can be made to tell us who truly sent the letter. But I will need your help. Will you watch with me in the room tonight?]

There was long silence, the sow seeming to sink, almost visibly, into the darkness of her stillness and depression. Then with a sigh she emitted a vast belch. [Yes, Outlander Girl. I will watch.]



They entered the chamber an hour before sunset and bolted and barred the door from within. [This creature, it does not hurt morrts?] asked Kufbrug, stroking one of the fifteen or so that clung to her flesh, and Callista smiled and remembered to thrust her chin and grunt.

[You will be in this cage, to protect you,] she said. [All you must do is watch. Do not come out, for the thing is dangerous: a *kheilwar*, it is called. A homunculus-wasp of the dark world of Af'El.]

[And you?] Kufbrug watched her through the mesh as Callista shut the cage and showed her how to work the bolt.

[Someone must make it tell us what it knows.]

She had brought a bowl with her, slightly larger than the pottery bowl she had found there that morning, and this she filled with a solution of proteins and sugars, the analog, she guessed, of the more makeshift blood that had been left there the night before. She assumed that the blood had contained poison of some kind, set by whoever had released the *kheilwar* in an attempt to kill it, but there were very few poisons that would work on such a creature. Even the concentrate of mer-

cury in her own protein solution would probably do no more than take the edge off the *kheilwar*'s speed. The room was full of organic substances that the thing had been eating for all these days—she'd noticed this morning how chewed and small the dwoob-skin rugs were, and that most of the molds had been eaten off the walls.

She took the last of her purchases—three lamps—and flicked

*[Sometimes...I
want gweek.
Gweek for me.
More so in
slushtime, in the
cold and the
dark.]*

them on, setting them in the corners of the room where they would not be overset. Then she sat down with her back to the mesh of the cage, unhooked her lightsaber from her belt, and settled herself to wait.

[What shall we do if your *kheilwar* will not tell us what we wish to know?]

She looked up in surprise at the rumbled question from behind her. Most Gamorreans dealt with simple survival, simple mating, simple fighting. She had not expected a question about contingencies. Even Ugmush, who was one of the smarter sows, generally didn't think things out in advance.

[It will,] said Callista. [If we can force it into that corner]—She gestured to the reflective sections of the walls, the agrinium gleaming molten amber in the dimming light of sunset. [—And keep it in that corner until day comes.]

After a long silence, Kufbrug said, [I thought maybe Guth and I go away.]

Callista looked back at her again, startled, but Kufbrug was stroking one of her morrts, her eyes downcast, and did not see.

[I tell Guth, when he come to fight Vrokk. We go away, he not be killed. But, then Rog and Gundruk rule Bolgoink too. That is not good. So Guth say no, he will fight.]

Kufbrug raised her eyes. [Vrokk hate Guth. Guth is good. Vrokk was not good. Guth...] She hesitated, trying to formulate words for a concept seldom spoken of. [I am *gweek*,] she went on after a moment, and touched the morrts on her arms, gestured to the tower around them. [All this—*gweek*. Husbands and tuskers and fields and children—*gweek*. Sometimes...I want *gweek*. *Gweek* for me. More so in slushtime, in the cold and the dark. Guth....] She touched her massive chest sadly. [He is *gweek* in his heart. If he die, if Rog kill him....]

She stood silent for a time, her big, clawed hand resting on the mesh of the cage, staring dully into an empty future. Callista rose and touched the heavy fingers, Luke Skywalker returning to her memory, as he did every day. "Yes," she said softly. "I know."

A pebble clattered on the other side of the chamber, falling mortar crumbling from a crack. Callista swung around, the lightsaber humming to life in her hand. Her throat closed with shock and horror as the *kheilwar* threaded and crept from the cracks in the rough stone wall.

It massed at least twenty kilos. Huge, flat, it unfurled all its



razored fins, turning and flexing them in the cool white lamplight, which like many creatures of Af'El it absorbed, so that it appeared to be nothing but planes of shadow that appeared and vanished. Callista flattened back against the cage-mesh as the creature popped into the air with horrible speed, dropped on the bowl of poisoned proteins; she heard the whirring grind of its mouths as it sucked and ate. Thank all the gods and the lucky stars and the ancestral spirits of the galaxy, thought Callista, that they'd thought the room was haunted and kept that door locked at night....

It came at her. Suddenly, like a jump-cut in a holovid: heat or blood-smell or the electrical field of living cells, no one knew quite what drew the eyeless thing—no one had been able to study them very closely—but Callista dodged, sidestepped, slashed with her lightsaber, ducked away....

And she knew she was in for a long night.

Whirling, springing, a spinning buzz-saw of fins and wings, it followed her, and she was hard put to keep herself away from it, let alone drive in into the agrinium sheen of the corner she had prepared. At least it wasn't tiny enough to fly up her nose or into her eye or ear or mouth, she thought; at least it was big enough to fight. But its speed increased with its size rather than diminished; it was like being chased all over the room by a turbospeed remote, and though it hurt her even to form his name in her mind Callista silently thanked Luke Skywalker for the sheer physical rigor of his training. She might no longer be able to touch the Force, she thought grimly, but at least she was fast on her feet.

And the thought whispered to her, *But you can use the Force.*

She cut, slashed, dodged again.

The Force is anger, as much as it is serenity. It is hate, as much as it is hope.

The thing flew at her face as if fired from a projectile cannon, and among the tearing blur of wings she saw its mouths, its glittering black crystalline teeth. She barely got away that time, blood streaming down her face and arm where the threshing vortex had caught her, her long hair unravelling from its knot and catching in the blood.

The Force is in that thing as well as in you. Why limit yourself?

She plunged in, cutting coolly, cleanly, not hating, not feeling, only working to drive it towards the agrinium shielding in the corner. It slipped weightlessly from her and attacked, vanished for a nerve-twisting minute only to whirl out behind her from under the bed.

Why not use the dark side, if it'll save you? You're entitled. Which of course, she thought bitterly, was what the dark side was all about.

She put it from her mind, making herself see this as a contest of skill only, a deadly contest, but a physical one. The thing was big, and it was fast, she thought, but she could do it.... If her strength and her breath held out until morning.

Then she heard the metal of the cage clang, and glimpsed the great dark moving shape of Kufbrug from the corner of her eye. Most people thought of Gamorreans as clumsy, never having seen Ugmush in a fight. Kufbrug lunged to the wall where Vrokk's weapons hung, then went after the *kheilwar* like two hundred kilos of enraged thunderstorm, a double-ended halberd in each hand, a little like a very, very big *kheilwar* herself. Callista fell back, panting, almost spent, while the sow worked the spinning horror, keeping it off Callista until she could catch her breath. Then Callista waded in again, the two of them driving the thing into the corner with lightsaber and halberds.

It tried to slither into the wall again, but Callista had been very careful about sealing the cracks. So slick were the agrinium panels that the *kheilwar* slid to the floor, where it tried to run along the base of the wall to safety. Callista drove it back on one side, then Kufbrug on the other.

It was a long—an impossibly, appallingly long—night. Callista's knees and hands were shaking with fatigue and the exhaustion of concentration, her hair was dripping with blood and sweat, when the first threads of light began to show in the window. The mercury poison was finally working in the *kheilwar*'s system, or else the effort of fighting two opponents had told on it, in its last five or six attacks. It crouched in its glimmering, reflective corner, spined fins waving, antennae shifting as it picked up the changes in the air.

And then, as Callista had been told *kheilwars* did—as a defense or a bait, the researchers weren't sure—it changed.

A slouched, green-snouted Rodian stood in front of them. Jabdo Garrink, presumably, the shady importer who brought the thing to the planet in the first place. "You have to let me out of here," he said, and started for the edge of the reflective shields. "You have to let me out."

Kufbrug drove him back.

"You have to let me out!" It was no longer the Rodian, but Vrokk, or a boar Callista presumed was Vrokk, huge and black with a streak

of white down one side of his face. He lunged for the far corner of the room, and Callista met him in a stride, lightsaber slashing.

[Let me out!] Vrokk, or the echo of Vrokk—the echo of anyone the *kheilwar* had seen, anyone that might serve as a decoy—faded into Rog, only slightly smaller, eyes red and angry as he ran at Kufbrug, and Kufbrug slashed him—it—across the face with her halberd. [Let me out!] Gundruk's face and voice screamed out the words. [Let me out! Let me out! Let me out!]

She was still screaming thus when the light brightened in the window, the full-spectrum rays of the sun flashing from the agrinium, blinding and burning the *kheilwar*'s sensors so that it buzzed and bounced on the slick metal, helpless. Callista stepped forward and cut it in half with her lightsaber, and stepped back from the thick trail of brown filth into which it dissolved.



Rog and Gundruk fled from Bolgoink Hold the next day, rather than face Kufbrug's challenge to combat in vengeance for her husband's murder. Having seen Kufbrug in a fight, Callista didn't blame them in the least. Because the challenge was a legal one, the pair also abandoned their holdings in Nudskutch, which was taken over by another of Kufbrug's daughters. "And my guess is," Callista said to Jos and Sebastin, who had been invited to Guth and

Kufbrug's wedding-feast, "they'll have to get off the planet completely the minute trade starts up again."

"Pity the competition wherever they end up," said Jos. He'd been chained to the High Trough—a position of honor, for a slave—between the other two outlanders, but Callista had had a duplicate key made and unfastened him as soon as she thought Ugmush and her husbands too drunk to notice, which happened in fairly short order. Guth, Ugmush and Kufbrug were embracing happily and slathering one another with spiced wall-fungus and creamed fug from the High Trough—perfectly appropriate behavior, and everyone else in the enormous hall was doing more or less the same—and singing. Gamorreans are no shier about celebrating happiness and friendship than they are about aggression.

Sebastin dipped a bowlful of fug from the trough. He, Callista and Jos were all familiar enough with Gamorrean table-manners to bring bowls. Towels, too. "But what did Rog and Gundruk hope to gain?"

"Gundruk," said Callista. "Rog was only her pawn. I doubt he even knew why she sent him to get the note from you, and to buy the *kheilwar*. I suspected her from the first—very few boars would have the brains to plot a murder. All she had to do was make sure the letter was delivered to Vrokk at night, since sunlight burns out *kheilwar*'s sensory organs. As Kufbrug's daughter, she stood a good chance of stepping into the position of clan matron."

"Clan matron?" asked Sebastin, puzzled. "But..."

Up at the other end of the High Trough Kufbrug had dragged Guth down into the trough with her for a messy tussle, to the screaming approbation of the other guests.

"You don't think of Gamorreans as being subject to depression," she said quietly. "But it's fairly common, especially in slushtime. And most people don't think of Gamorreans as being capable of passionate love; the kind of love that almost cannot survive, if the loved one is gone."

Luke Skywalker's face returned to her mind, and she put the image aside, as she had forced herself to learn to do.

"But Gundruk knew," she went on softly. "Gundruk knew that Kufbrug is a depressive, and Gundruk knew that while Guth almost certainly would be killed by Vrokk, there was a chance that he would opt out of the fight at the last minute and simply stay on in the household as a tusker. But if Guth had no chance of survival—if he were charged with murder—it would be easy to pass off

Kufbrug's subsequent death as suicide. And, there would be no Vrokk to contest Rog and Gundruk's takeover of the clan."

Down in the main part of the hall a food-fight had erupted between Lugh's guards and several of Kufbrug's sons-in-law. Squealing with delight, the veterans and the children joined in, and in no time the entire place was one happy, howling brawl.

"I think it's time for an after-dinner walk," said Sebastin, ducking half a roast brognig.

"I think you're right."

Jos, Sebastin and Callista picked their way carefully around the outer edge of the hall and up the steps to the door through a maelstrom of fists, bread, heaving bodies and flying goo. From the door Callista looked back to see Ugmush and her crew plunge happily into the fray. Up at the High Trough, oblivious to it all, Kufbrug and Guth were clinched in a mighty embrace.

Nice, thought Callista, to forget that you were *gweek* for a while, that you were the mother-source and fountainhead of strength. To find someone to get you through slushtime. Someone to love.

Comforting also to realize that while at times the dark side of the Force seemed to permeate the very fabric of the universe, even among such unprepossessing subjects as the swinish Gamorreans could be found caring, and love, and light.

A glob of cream-soaked fug missed her head by inches and splattered on the wall. She tasted a fingerful. It was surprisingly good.

ROLEPLAYING GAME STATISTICS

■ CALLISTA MING

Type: Former Jedi Knight

DEXTERITY 3D

Blaster 5D, brawling parry 4D+1, dodge 4D+1, lightsaber 13D, melee combat 5D+1, melee parry 5D+1, running 6D

KNOWLEDGE 3D

Alien species 5D, cultures 5D+2, intimidation 4D, languages 4D, planetary systems 4D+2, survival 4D, willpower 5D, willpower: resist persuasion 8D+2

MECHANICAL 3D

Archaic ship piloting 5D, astrogation 4D+2, beast riding 6D, capital ship gunnery 9D, ground vehicle operation 4D, ground vehicle operation: ark 7D, repulsorlift operation 4+1, sensors 5D, starfighter piloting 4D, starfighter piloting: Y-wing 6D, starship gunnery 4D+1, starship shields 5D

PERCEPTION 3D

Bargain 5D+1, command 4D, hide 7D, investigation 9D, persuasion 7D, search 8D+1, sneak 8D+2

STRENGTH 2D

Brawling 3D, climbing/jumping 5D, stamina 4D+1, swimming 10D, swimming:

deepwater submerging 9D

TECHNICAL 3D

Blaster repair 4D+1, computer programming/repair 7D, demolitions 5D, droid programming 7D, droid repair 5D, first aid 7D, lightsaber repair 10D, repulsorlift repair 3D+2, security 9D, space transports repair 4D, starfighter repair 5D, starship weapon repair 5D

This character is blocked from the Force and can neither tap into Force powers or be detected by Force users.

Force Points: 3

Dark Side Points: 4

Character Points: 15

Move: 10

Equipment: Lightsaber (5D)

Capsule: Callista grew up on the water-world of Chad with her family, herding and cultivating wander-kelp, until Jedi Master Djin Altis arrived to show her the way and life of a Jedi, about 25 years prior to the first Death Star's destruction.



For five years Callista remained aboard the *Chu'unthor*—Master Altis' starship—learning the ways of the Force. During her journeys aboard the *Chu'unthor*, she met Geith, her lover. The pair met while the *Chu'unthor* had a brief layover at Bepin. She sensed his ability with the Force and asked him to come with her back to the *Chu'unthor*. He did, but his motivation was to get closer to Callista than to live the Jedi way.

While under the tutelage of Master Djin, Callista met Plett, a Ho'Din Jedi Master who was gath-

ering (and hiding) the children of the Jedi (in order to keep the Emperor from completely extinguishing the flame of the Jedi Knights). It was during this time that the Jedi learned of the *Eye of Palpatine*, a death ship being built for the sole purpose of extinguishing all traces of the Jedi.

After discovering that the Emperor knew about the colony of Plett's Well, Plett and Master Djin called for volunteers to take on the suicidal mission of destroying the *Eye of Palpatine*. Among others, Callista volunteered, and so did Geith, although it was obvious Geith's heart was not with the plan.

It was during this attack that she stopped the *Eye of Palpatine*'s automated systems, but nearly at the cost of own life. Callista managed to save her "essence," joining her spirit with the computer banks of the *Eye of Palpatine*, alongside the Will, the powerful artificial intelligence that ran the superweapon.

Thirty years later, still "alive," Callista suddenly discovered that someone had used the Force to find and activate the death-machine, in turn reactivating the Will. As the *Eye of Palpatine* began going through the process of its program (the destruction of Plett's Well), the ship began to collect secretly "stashed" troops that had been stationed about the galaxy. The troops, now dead and or gone, were no longer where they were supposed to be, so the *Eye of Palpatine*'s computer took what was there, not knowing it wasn't picking up the right material.

Among these collected beings were Luke Skywalker, Cray Mingla, Nichos Marr (a former Jedi whose conscious had been placed into a cyborg-android body) and C-3PO. Callista, weary and lost in her own world, watched Luke scramble about the *Eye of Palpatine*. Slowly she began to help the Jedi Master. Along the way Callista discovered that she loved him and he loved her.

But she would not yet allow that love to interfere with the mission at hand, the utter destruction of *Eye of Palpatine*, so she convinced Cray to stun Luke and put him into one of the shuttles they were going to use to evacuate the other collected lifeforms while she, Cray and Nichos destroyed the Will and the *Eye of Palpatine*.

As Cray and the cyborg-android Nichos fought to eradicate the Will, Callista watched as the shuttle departed the *Eye of Palpatine*, knowing that she loved Luke. Then suddenly Cray called out to her, told her that she didn't want to live without the "real" Nichos. Cray asked Callista if she would want to take her body, escape the *Eye of Palpatine* and have a chance at life once more. Callista, inspired by her love for Luke, eagerly accepted the chance.

The next thing she knew, she was being pulled out of a escape pod by Luke, Han, Leia and Mara Jade near Plett's Well. Despite her miraculous rescue, the newly resurrected Jedi did not emerge unscathed: she had lost all her powers and abilities in the Force. Despite her loss, she returned with Luke to the Jedi Academy on Yavin 4.

Callista's time at the Academy was one of sorrow and pain, full of reminders of her loss. Luke and the other Jedi searched constantly for records and clues to free Callista from her Force-blocking curse. Callista was beginning to lose hope. Luke decided to take Callista away from the

Academy and all its distractions to work on getting her Force powers back as well as to give them time together.

To Callista's horror she discovered that she could activate the Force, but only through the dark side. When she and Luke became stranded in a dead-floating ship in the Hoth system, he entered a hibernation trance while she awaited rescue in the only survival suit. She had never been so alone in her life, not even during her stay aboard the *Eye of Palpatine*. It was not long after that Callista discovered that she must leave Luke, if she was ever going to be with him. Her love for him was too much of an enticement for her to risk accepting the dark side.

After returning to Yavin 4, Callista discovered the planet was besieged by Admiral Daala's Super Star Destroyer *Knight Hammer*. During the battle Callista felt helpless among the Jedi defenders, especially Luke. Resentful of Luke's need to "protect" her, she went off on her own, determined to assist in her own way. Commandeering a downed TIE bomber, she made her way aboard the *Knight Hammer* and sabotaged the massive Super Star Destroyer.

Callista then set out to find Admiral Daala, tracking her as the Imperial made her way toward a bank of escape pods. Calling upon the dark side, Callista managed to block Daala's blaster shots with her lightsaber until the Admiral managed to stop the former Jedi with a stun blast.

Callista awoke minutes later as the *Knight Hammer* plunged uncontrolled into the atmosphere of Yavin 4. She managed to jettison away from the dying ship in an escape pod, then slipped aboard a ship leaving Yavin 4. Days later, on Coruscant, she left a message for Luke in his room, knowing that her disconnection from the Force would hide her. She would find a way to rekindle her powers, but it would have to be done by her...alone.

■ CAPTAIN UGMUSH

Type: Gamorrean Trader

DEXTERITY 3D+2

Brawling parry 4D+1, melee combat 5D+2, melee parry 4D, thrown weapons 5D+1

KNOWLEDGE 2D

Business 3D+2, intimidation 4D, languages 3D+2, streetwise 4D, survival 4D

MECHANICAL 1D+2

Astrogation 3D, communications 2D+1, sensors 2D+2, space transports 3D+2,

starship shields 2D

PERCEPTION 3D

Bargain 4D, command 5D, persuasion 4D

STRENGTH 5D

Brawling 6D+2, stamina 6D

TECHNICAL 1D+2

First aid 3D

Special Abilities:

Voice Box: Due to the configuration of their voice box, Gamorreans are unable to pronounce Basic, although they can understand it perfectly well.

Stamina: Gamorreans have great *stamina*; if they fail a *stamina* check, they may immediately make a second check.

Story Factors:

Droid Hate: Gamorreans hate droids and other mechanical beings, and often

destroy them for fun.

Reputation: Gamorreans are widely regarded as primitive, brutal, and mindless. Gamorreans who show thoughtfulness and manners are disregarded and ridiculed by fellow Gamorreans.

Character Points: 5

Move: 7

Equipment: Blaster (4D), diamond nose-rings, freighter *Zicreex*, transliterator, war club (STR+1D)

Capsule: The Gamorrean sow Ugmush is the owner of the *Zicreex* and founder of her own clan. With the aid of her husband, brother, crew of tuskers, human slave Jos, and the human Jedi Callista, she travels from Gamorr to nearby worlds. Ugmush makes a decent living trading whatever cargoes she can find, and manages to keep everyone fed. She returns to Gamorr in slushtime and cromptime to trade, socialize, and eat her homeworld's ethnic foods. Ugmush is a *gweek* matron in her own right, with responsibility for property, a good husband and small household. Ugmush became a clan founder under Gamorrean law when she acquired non-inherited property (the *Zicreex*) not claimable by her own clan matron.

Ugmush owns a blaster for using against aliens. While she's a better shot than most Gamorreans, her aim is still pretty bad. She prefers to use her studded war club. Ugmush doesn't really understand the workings of the ship and relies on Jos to keep it running (administering a severe beating when she thinks he's not doing his job) and Callista to crew the gun. Ugmush is also a good cook, with a famous recipe for mold stew.

■ GUTH

Type: Gamorrean Boar

DEXTERITY 4D

Brawling parry 5D, melee combat 6D, melee parry 5D+2

KNOWLEDGE 2D

Intimidation 4D, languages 3D, streetwise 3D+2

MECHANICAL 1D+2

Communications 2D, sensors 2D+1, space transports 2D+1, starship gunnery 2D,

starship shields 2D

PERCEPTION 3D

Command 4D

STRENGTH 5D

Brawling 6D+2, stamina 5D+2

TECHNICAL 1D+1

Special Abilities:

Voice Box: Due to the configuration of their voice box, Gamorreans are unable to pronounce Basic, although they can understand it perfectly well.

Stamina: Gamorreans have great *stamina*; if they fail a *stamina* check, they may immediately make a second check.

Story Factors:

Droid Hate: Gamorreans hate droids and other mechanical beings, and often destroy them for fun.

Reputation: Gamorreans are widely regarded as primitive, brutal, and mindless. Gamorreans who show thoughtfulness and manners are disregarded and ridiculed by fellow Gamorreans.

Character Points: 4

**Move:** 8

Equipment: Vibro-ax (STR+3D+1), heavy leather vest (+1D physical)

Capsule: Guth is Ugmush's brother. He is small for a Gamorrean boar, although fierce at heart and dedicated to his goals. Guth is in love with the great clan matron Kufbrug and recently challenged her husband, Vrokk, to a death-match for her hand.

JOS

A Liannan human, Jos was the engineer on the *G'mi Moa*, a Liannan bulk freighter operating on the Perlemian Trade Route, when the

ship was captured by the infamous pirate Gunda Mabin. Mabin sold the survivors into slavery. Jos, scarred in the attack, was bought by a Gamorrean sow named Ugmush, who needed someone to maintain her freighter, an old Subla Ransom named the *Zicreex*. Jos is a deeply gloomy man. He was never particularly cheery when free, but several years of slavery to Gamorreans has wrapped him in a cloak of impenetrable depression.

Jos. All stats 2D except: *alien species: Gamorreans* 4D, *languages: Gamorrean* 4D, *Perception* 1D+1, *Strength* 1D+2, *stamina* 3D, *Technical* 3D, *computer programming/repair* 3D+2, *droid repair* 3D+1, *first aid* 3D+2, *space transports repair* 4D+1. Move 10. Character Points: 3. Datapad, starship repair tool kit.

ZICREEX

Craft: Subla Ransom Cargo Hauler

Type: Medium freighter

Scale: Starfighter

Length: 75.5 meters

Skill: Space transports

Crew: 5

Crew Skill: Varies, typically 3D-5D

Passengers: 5

Cargo Capacity: 450 metric tons

Consumables: 3 months

Cost: Not available for sale

Hyperdrive Multiplier: x2

Hyperdrive Backup: x12

Nav Computer: Yes

Maneuverability: 1D

Space: 5

Atmosphere: 335; 950 kmh

Hull: 5D

Shields: 2D

Sensors:

Passive: 30/1D

Scan: 65/2D

Search: 110/3D

Focus: 4/4D

Weapons:

1 Blaster Cannon

Fire Arc: Turret

Skill: Starship gunnery

Fire Control: 2D

Space Range: 1-5/10/17

Atmosphere Range: 100-500/1/1.7 km

Damage: 5D

Capsule: The *Zicreex* is a Subla Ransom medium cargo hauler, a reliable but little-known freighter from the Mid-Rim. Its crew consists of Captain Ugmush, a Gamorrean sow, and her husband, brother, two tuskers, a human slave named Jos, and the Jedi Knight Callista. Although the ship is armed, its main defense against pirates is the Gamorrean reputation for being unboardable. *Zicreex* was the name of the ship under its previous owner, but under Gamorrean law it technically should be the *Ugmush*. Captain Ugmush just never got around to filling out the BoSS datawork.

KUFBRUG

Type: Clan Matron

DEXTERITY 4D

Brawling parry 5D, melee combat 7D+2, melee parry 6D, thrown weapons 6D+2

KNOWLEDGE 2D

Business 4D, intimidation 5D

MECHANICAL 1D+1

PERCEPTION 3D

Bargain 4D, command 6D, persuasion 5D

STRENGTH 5D



Force Points: 2
Character Points: 15
Move: 7

Equipment: Bolgoink clan lands, household tuskers, fortress, arsenal, wardrobe of gowns, gaudy gold-bead necklaces, earrings, and nose-rings, 21 morrts, two double-edged hand halberds (STR+2D)

Capsule: Kufbrug is the matron of the Bolgoink clan. She is regularly courted by tusker boars who hope to win her favor. Some of these boars even dare to court her as a potential wife, and one, Guth, attracted her attention for his *gweek* heart. Unfortunately, her husband, Vrokk, was a massive and powerful boar, far too powerful to challenge in combat; although she did not love Vrokk, she believed he was unbeatable. Kufbrug was surprised to learn that Guth had challenged Vrokk, and it grieved her to know that Guth would die for her. It grieved her even further when Guth was accused of Vrokk's murder.

Kufbrug is almost two meters tall, weighs over 200 kilos, with yellow

Brawling 6D+2,
stamina 7D

TECHNICAL 1D+2

First aid 4D

Special Abilities:

Voice Box: Due to the configuration of their voice box, Gamorreans are unable to pronounce Basic, although they can understand it perfectly well.

Stamina: Gamorreans have great *stamina*; if they fail a *stamina* check, they may immediately make a second check.

Story Factors:

Droid Hate: Gamorreans hate droids and other mechanical beings, and often destroy them for fun.

Reputation: Gamorreans are widely regarded as primitive, brutal, and mindless. Those who show thoughtfulness and manners are disregarded and ridiculed by fellow Gamorreans.

eyes, and wears her long green-brown hair in braids. For a Gamorrean, she is resplendent and glorious. Kufbrug does suffer from seasonal depression, but this is not polite to comment on. She rarely travels without her guard, but is fully able to defend herself.

LUGH

Type: Second Warlord

DEXTERITY 4D

Brawling parry 5D, melee combat 7D+2, melee parry 7D, thrown weapons 6D+2

KNOWLEDGE 2D

Intimidation 5D+2, law enforcement 3D, survival: Gamorr 3D+2, tactics 3D, willpower 4D

MECHANICAL 1D+1

PERCEPTION 3D

Command 5D+1

STRENGTH 5D

Brawling 6D+2, stamina 6D+1

TECHNICAL 1D+2

Armor repair 3D+1

Special Abilities:

Voice Box: Due to the configuration of their voice box, Gamorreans are unable to pronounce Basic, although they can understand it perfectly well.

Stamina: Gamorreans have great *stamina*; if they fail a *stamina* check, they may immediately make a second check.

Story Factors:

Droid Hate: Gamorreans hate droids and other mechanical beings, and often destroy them for fun.

Reputation: Gamorreans are widely regarded as primitive, brutal, and mindless. Those who show thoughtfulness and manners are disregarded and ridiculed by fellow Gamorreans.

Force Points: 1

Character Points: 12

Move: 7

Equipment: Vibro-ax (STR+3D+1), chain and leather armor (+2D+2 physical, -1D to *Dexterity* and related skills), 2 throwing axes (STR+2), 7 morrts, gold necklaces, arm-bands, rings, and earring

Capsule: Lugh is the second warlord of Bolgoink, a position granted by Kufbrug to the most able warlord in the hold. Lugh is dark green, yellow eyed, thin for a Gamorrean, and heavily scarred from years of campaigning, with severely knocked ears. Lugh is in charge of the Bolgoink household tuskers and is entrusted with the security of the main fortress. Because of his loyal service, Lugh still holds the second warlord position, though his wife, one of Kufbrug's daughters, died two winters ago.

GUNDRUK

Type: Matron

DEXTERITY 4D

Brawling parry 5D, melee combat 6D+2, melee parry 5D+2, thrown weapons 6D

KNOWLEDGE 2D

Business 4D, intimidation 4D

MECHANICAL 1D+2

PERCEPTION 3D

Bargain 4D, command 6D, con 5D, persuasion 5D



Dark Side Points: 1
Character Points: 3
Move: 7

Equipment: Gaudy necklaces, earrings, and nose-rings, embroidered gown, 16 morrts, knife (STR+1D)

Capsule: Gundruk is one of Kufbrug's elder daughters, holder of the Nudskutch region of the Bolgoink hereditary claim. Smaller than her mother, darker, and less *gweek*, Gundruk was jealous of her mother's wealth and suitors, and decided to remove both her and her husband from the clanship head. When she discovered that Guth, a tusker with little political connection, was courting her mother, she began to work on a plan to clear the way to rulership of all the Bolgoink lands. Finally, she hit on a plan when Guth challenged Vrokk, Kufbrug's current husband and Bolgoink warlord, to a death-match and enlisted the aid of her faithful but thick husband, Rog.

STRENGTH 4D+2
Brawling 6D+2

TECHNICAL 1D+2
First aid 4D

Special Abilities:

Voice Box: Due to the configuration of their voice box, Gamorreans are unable to pronounce Basic, although they can understand it perfectly well.

Stamina: Gamorreans have great *stamina*; if they fail a *stamina* check, they may immediately make a second check.

Story Factors:

Droid Hate: Gamorreans hate droids and other mechanical beings, and often destroy them for fun.

Reputation: Gamorreans are widely regarded as primitive, brutal, and mindless. Those who show thoughtfulness and manners are disregarded and ridiculed by fellow Gamorreans.

Force Points: 1

■ **ROG**

Type: Warlord

DEXTERITY 4D

Brawling parry 5D, melee combat 8D, melee parry 7D+1, thrown weapons 6D

KNOWLEDGE 2D

Intimidation 5D, law enforcement 2D+1, survival: Gamorr 4D, tactics 2D+2, willpower 3D

MECHANICAL 1D+2

PERCEPTION 2D+2

Command 5D

STRENGTH 5D

Brawling 7D, climbing/jumping 5D+1, stamina 6D

TECHNICAL 1D+2

Armor repair 3D

Special Abilities:

Voice Box: Due to the configuration of their voice box, Gamorreans are unable to pronounce Basic, although they can understand it perfectly well.

Stamina: Gamorreans have great *stamina*; if they fail a *stamina* check, they may immediately make a second check.

Story Factors:

Droid Hate: Gamorreans hate droids and other mechanical beings, and often destroy them for fun.

Reputation: Gamorreans are widely regarded as primitive, brutal, and mindless. Gamorreans who show thoughtfulness and manners are disregarded and ridiculed by fellow Gamorreans.

Force Points: 1

Character Points: 10

Move: 8

Equipment: Vibro-ax (STR+3D+1), partial plate armor (+3D physical, -1D to *Dexterity* and related skills), 8 morrts, gold necklaces, arm-bands, rings, and earrings

Capsule: Rog is the husband to Gundruk and warlord of the Nudskutch holding. Rog is a massive and powerful boar with a relatively small hold, who covets the large army his brother, Vrokk, can raise with his wife's riches. Rog is a bit thick, but smarter than the average boar. While he didn't really understand Gundruk's plot to gain political power by inheriting her mother's lands, he thought it sounded good, and helped her like a good husband should.

■ **SEBASTIN ONYX**

Type: Protocol Liaison

DEXTERITY 2D+2

Blaster 3D, dodge 3D+2

KNOWLEDGE 4D

Alien species 5D, business 4D+2, cultures 5D, languages 7D, scholar: poetry 7D, streetwise 5D, survival 4D+2

MECHANICAL 2D+2

Communications 3D, repulsorlift operation 3D

PERCEPTION 4D

Bargain 5D, con 4D+1, investigation 4D+1, persuasion 4D+2

STRENGTH 2D

TECHNICAL 2D+2

Computer programming/repair 3D, droid programming 3D+1, droid repair 3D, first aid 3D+1

Force Points: 1

Character Points: 6

Move: 10

Equipment: Datapad with language database and programs, power generator, music system, parchment, sealing wax

Capsule: Sebastin Onyx is a young human protocol liaison and translator working at Jugsmuk Station. Sebastin is small, fair-haired, and shy, but cheery and enthusiastic. Most of the year Sebastin uses his extensive linguistic and protocol expertise to guide visitors to Gamorr in their dealings with Gamorreans and the local law and culture. Gamorreans positively despise droids, leaving a decent demand for organic protocol liaisons on their homeworld. Few traders want to insult a sow in trade agreements—not when she has a few big, strong and ugly tuskers to demonstrate her displeasure, and Sebastin makes a decent living in spring and autumn. Sebastin occasionally makes an extra fee for helping negotiate a mercenary contract.

In summer and winter trading dies down. In winter Sebastin makes ends meet by providing boars with love-songs and poetry to flatter their wives. In summer he hunkers down behind the Jugsmuk defense perimeter and hopes the blood-lusty boars remember that he's no threat.

■ KHEILWAR

Type: Predator

DEXTERITY 4D

Brawling parry 6D

PERCEPTION 4D

Search 5D, sneak 5D

STRENGTH 4D

Brawling 6D, stamina 7D

Special Abilities:

Razor-fins: Cause STR+2D damage.

Super-thinness: The kheilwar can flatten and fold itself out to an extraordinary degree, and slip into very small cracks, crannies, and niches to hide.

Impersonate: The kheilwar can momentarily take on the image and sound of another being or creature it has seen. It does not seem to use this ability to select a particular image, instead picking recent impressions as a decoy. This is probably some kind of telepathic projection, since the kheilwar can communicate simple concepts, and they are understood in the language of the observer.

Light Blind: The kheilwar is unable to "see" in strong light (and possibly other radiation) and is unable to attack while blinded. Its visual sense organs are often destroyed by direct sunlight.

Move: 20 (flight)

Size: 0.01–2 meters

Capsule: The kheilwar, the homunculus-wasp of Af'El, is a dark and dangerous creature, deadly to nearly all forms of life. In the larval stage it is near-microscopic—a kheilwar is only slightly larger when it first matures. It seeks warm, natural crevasses in which to feed and grow, often invading a live biological host. It is believed that a kheilwar can grow quickly if well-fed. Fast, deadly, strong, and mean, the kheilwar is a whirling storm of sharp fins, mandibles, and wings. Study of the

creature is, understandably, difficult. They are unable to use sensory organs (whatever they are) in strong visible-spectrum light such as sunlight.

(The statistics above reflect a roughly 10 kilo kheilwar. Subtract 1D–2D from attributes and skills for small specimens and add 1D–2D for larger ones.)



THE GAMORREAN YEAR

SLUSHTIME

Spring—called slushtime for the snow-melt, rain, and omnipresent mud—is planting season for the sows and training time for the boars. The wet weather of early spring results in bumper crops of short-term fungi and gives the longer growing molds a good start. Early slushtime is the season when veterans whip younglings into

shape and unattached tuskers roam looking for adventure.

Early slushtime is a dreary, depressing time. The sky is almost constantly gray and it rains daily. The weather makes some beings grumpy or deeply depressed. This is not a polite subject among the Gamorreans, who usually prefer strong and fierce emotions.

Most of the year's births come in spring, about a Gamorrean gestation period after the boars returned from campaign in the fall. Gamorreans come in litters of three to nine, with a ten-to-one ratio of males to females. Females are born only every second litter or so.

Mid-slushtime is the marriage season. Marriages are arranged and performed in short succession. Clan alliances and mercenary contracts for the upcoming war season are proposed, negotiated, and finalized. Young boars are exchanged for fostering, and sows ready their boars for the coming war season.

In late spring, as slushtime dries up, clans begin to raid their rivals' lands. Loosely attached tuskers make up the bulk of these raids, trying to demonstrate their boariness. Clans use tuskers in these raids because their actions are easily dismissed as the actions of adventurous and rowdy bravos.

WARTIME

Summer is called wartime. The boars march off to battle in reprisal for raids, accompanied by unwed sows and young boars-in-training. Married sows, younglings, elders, and a small guard of reliable boars remain at the clan fortress.

Gamorrean strategic goals are straightforward: plunder, pillage, and occupy land. Early summer typically sees a number of small-scale testing battles, as each clan probes the strength of the others. By mid-summer the clans have settled down to the business of besieging each other, and with the heat of late summer comes grand battles, desperate sallies and siege breaks, crescendoing in mass slaughter.

In the clan fortresses, the matrons, sows, and younglings spend their time preparing for, waiting out and recovering from sieges. Gamorreans take sieges very practically, and while away the time in assorted ways. The newly born younglings are called feeders, because they mostly eat until weaned in croptime. Weaned Gamorrean children are called shoats until they mature enough to take on training appropriate to their sex, at about age three. (Although "feeder" and "shoat" are a gender-neutral terms, they usually refer to males, since they are vastly more numerous.)

GAMORR

Type: Terrestrial
Temperature: Temperate
Atmosphere: Type I (breathable)
Hydrosphere: Moderate
Gravity: Standard
Terrain: Forest, jungle, mountain, plain
Length of Day: 28 standard hours
Length of Year: 380 local days
Sapient species: Gamorreans (N)
Starport: Landing field
Population: 500 million
Planet Function: Homeworld battleground
Government: Clans
Tech Level: Feudal
Major Exports: Mercenaries
Major Imports: Melee weapons

Capsule: Gamorr is a standard world in most physical respects. Although the hydrosphere is not wet enough to justify a Moist rating, the free water in the atmosphere is slightly high, leading to a high incidence of rain forests and dynamic, fierce weather. A high percentage of the land mass is covered in forest and jungle, often overgrowing mountainous terrain. Gamorrean forests are typically dense and damp. An amazing variety of fungi, including algark and snoruuk, is sheltered by the thick hardwood trees. No animals larger than a meter long or high are known to inhabit these forests. Larger animals may have existed previously and been hunted to extinction by the Gamorreans. Perhaps larger creatures are unable to compete with some of the deadlier fungi. Several smaller animals exist—birds, rodents, and primates—including the curious quizzers, morrts, and dwoobs.

CROPTIME

By autumn the clans have spent most of their strength. A few late mopping-up actions dwindle with the heat, and the boars straggle back home, triumphantly or quietly. By mid-season the clans have retired to their fortresses to settle in for winter.

The less-damaged tuskers are drafted by the sows to help harvest the crops and tend the wounded. Autumn fairs briefly flower as newly wealthy clans trade crops and plundered goods. Early seeds for new alliances are planted at these fairs. Tales of wartime's battles and heroics are told in verse and song, new widows advertise their availability, new veterans ceremoniously join their peers, a crop of new marriages (called widow weddings) are performed, and everyone feasts for the last time before winter.

COLDTIME

Winter—appropriately called coldtime—is a harsh season. Fierce storms are common and a clan too badly depleted in the summer may find itself starving and freezing. Winter raids sometimes result from this shortage, but these are more desperate than violent.

In more successful and powerful clans, boars and sows settle into a calm home life. Boars, ordinarily quite attentive, become positively docile, romantic, and cuddly. Boars sing songs and bring gifts to their wives, and court them in the same fashion as unmarried males of other species would a prospective mate. This continues into early spring, when whole flower fields are stripped of their blossoms to serve as gifts to wives. Tuskers spend their winters worshipping a select sow from afar, usually one of the clan matrons, making up songs, planning the next war season, and playing table games.

FAIRS

Local fairs spring up in slushtime and croptime. Fairs are places for sows to trade and boars to match muscles in semi-formal personal combat. Tuskers fight most of these contests to flaunt their desirability, although clan boars and veterans also show themselves off in combat to increase their wives' public standing.

Trade goods include foodstuffs, cheap weapons, household items, and personal adornments. Off-world traders come to these fairs with "rarities from exotic, far-off planets," consisting mostly of remaindered goods from neighboring systems. Off-world traders can't make a killing by selling hand weapons to the Gamorreans, but can turn a reliably modest profit. Gamorreans pay in precious metals.

Mercenary contracts are the other Gamorrean trade good of galactic interest. Gamorrean mercenary clans are an inevitable by-product of the regular warfare. Most clans occasionally fight with other clans for pay. Certain clans form small professional mercenary bands, and move from area to area selling their services to the highest bidder. Not completely driven by greed, the warlords of mercenary clans adhere to the ancient tradition of fighting a blood-battle to seal the deal. Once sealed, these clans go anywhere to fulfill a contract, and form the bulk of Gamorrean mercenaries commonly seen in the galaxy at large.

Most fairs are local, like the small Bolgoink Fair. It has a modest

tourney and a few dozen peddlers. Only a few are big enough to attract off-world merchants. One of the biggest fairs of the seasons is at Jugsmuk, attracting traders from all over Wugguh continent and from off world. Jugsmuk Fair has a huge tournament and days of fighting. Jugsmuk is a principle training fair, with young tuskers making their first challenges and older tuskers sharpening their skills and monitoring the competition.

GAMORREAN HONOR

Gamorrean honor is governed by a fairly simple set of rules and concepts.

Boars fight. Boars have no other function in Gamorrean society but to fight, or support fighting, such as standing guard or training others to fight. Boars who cannot or will not fight are killed by older boars, assuming their mother allowed them to survive childhood.

It is honorable for a boar to meet his opponent in combat and fight him with hand weapons, to first blood, to defeat, or to the death. This basic pattern is the basis for all Gamorrean combat, from individual tourney-fights to huge bloody battles.

Variance from this behavior is dishonorable. This includes using a weapon from a distance, using "magic" to kill, killing stealthily, or winning by cleverness.

Ranged weapons are of no use to a boar in combat against another honorable opponent (although they may be used against aliens or dishonored Gamorreans). The Gamorreans have no ranged siege engines, no bows, and only a few blasters acquired from off-worlders.

Using "magic" to kill is also dishonorable. "Magic" includes any advanced technology (like blasters), the Force, natural abilities the Gamorreans consider magic, and almost anything else Gamorreans don't understand.

Killing stealthily is extremely dishonorable. A Gamorrean can walk up to anyone armed, challenge him for no reason, kill him, and walk away without social disapproval. To sneak up behind someone and kill them when they're not looking (literally or figuratively) is an unforgivable wrong.

Being clever is moderately dishonorable for boars. Although there have been Gamorreans who used forethought and intelligence to help win battles, it is frowned on. Sows are generally more intelligent than boars, but even among them thinking too much is

socially unacceptable. Clever sows usually get around this without great difficulty, though, if they're not egotistical about it.

Sows rarely fight in pitched battles, although they often fight in single combat against raiders and besiegers, and occasionally in vengeance duels. Sows gain honor by being *gweek*: being matronly protectors, having many tuskers, having many children, owning land, and by managing their property well.

COMBAT

Gamorrean combat is almost exclusively hand-to-hand and usually muscle-powered. Gamorreans also use vibro-weapons, regarding their extra cutting power as the sign of a superior weapon. Once the power cells run down the weapons are replaced or recharged. The clans in regular contact with off-worlders (or "outlanders") no longer think of vibroblades as magic, as they did for a long time. To them, melee weapons of any kind are still better than magical "blaster weapons."

Gamorreans have little interest in ranged combat. They had made no development of ranged weapons before the arrival of Old Republic scouts, and once introduced to the idea, rejected it completely. The only way for a Gamorrean to prove his boariness is in close combat. Ranged weapons only show how good a shot you are.

Fair tourney fights are almost always to first blood, with a very few to the death. Fair tourneys are primarily to show off and attract attention, not risk one's life. Tourneys are also the site of prearranged death-matches to settle disputes between lethal enemies, including courting-matches, where a suitor for a sow's hand challenges her husband.

GAMORREAN SOCIETY

Gamorrean clans are ruled by clan chieftains, called warlords, and an important female, called a matron. Clan females are all related and trace their ancestry to a common matriarch. Males are exchanged between clans at a young age. Clans range in numbers from a few dozen to several hundred or more, but typical clans number about twenty sows and fifty boars, plus young. Clans control areas of land and are always interested in acquiring more. Traditionally, land can be acquired by either colonizing an area unclaimed or taking it away from another clan. Unfortunately, most arable land on the planet is already claimed, at least in name and

often by more than one clan. Gamorreans spend a fantastic amount of time fighting over it.

Female sows do all useful work, and own or lease all property. The sows can be as rough and violent as the males boars, though, and encourage boars to bloody deeds to prove their virility. For every sow born, there are ten boars, although a high fatality rate among boars results in a preponderance of elder sows. Sows can expect to have up to a dozen husbands over the course of a lifetime, and to have dozens of offspring. Gamorrean genealogy is an amazingly complex subject, attended to by a small class of sow scholars-lawyers who memorize long sagas listing genealogy, wars, heroic deeds, and property exchanges of all kinds.

All sows either own property or will, since land is divided among daughters evenly upon inheritance. Even unlanded sows have an income, since mothers lease out land to daughters to cultivate. These pieces of property range from small plots of land to vast acreages, or perhaps a portion of a business. Over generations these holdings are split into smaller and smaller sections, and matrons consolidating land are a chief factor in the ongoing Gamorrean wars.

Clan matrons are a small and select group of sows who own great tracts of land. Although boars battle to seize land from rival clans, they do so in the name of their clan matrons. These matrons usually have a number of household boar admirers, smitten with their beauty, grace, and personal power. Groups of matrons are led by a head sow; the most powerful, richest, and important matron in the clan. Matrons can be told from ordinary sows by their small, devoted bodyguard, and the high number of morrts they host.

Boars come in four basic varieties; warlords, clan boars, household boars (or tuskers), and veterans.

Warlords are the most powerful boars of a clan, both socially and physically, since they are husbands of the matrons. The greatest warlord of the clan is the general of all the clan armies, absolute ruler in all matters of war, and picked by the head sow for his skill at arms and past successes. The other warlords serve as captains of clan warriors. Warlords almost always come from the ranks of the tuskers. Warlords host up to twenty morrts at a time, and will sometimes favor greatly heroic boars with a morrt from their personal trove.

Clan boars are the married boars. They are important and respected because they have an income from their wives' lands and can afford good weapons and armor. Their relatively high position

is reflected in the ten or more morrts they proudly sport. Clan boars form the core of both the clan-guard and the clan armies. A clan boar cannot expect to become a warlord unless either his wife dies, a relatively rare occurrence, and he then happen, to marry a matron, or his wife inherits a matronage, an even rarer occurrence.

Clan Boars. All stats are 2D except: *Dexterity 3D, brawling parry 5D, melee combat 6D, melee parry 5D+1, thrown weapons 6D, Knowledge 1D, intimidation 3D+2, survival: Gamorr 4D, Mechanical 1D, Perception 1D, Strength 4D, brawling 6D+2, stamina 5D, Technical 1D, armor repair 3D. Ax (STR+2D), scale armor (+2D physical), 2-10 morrts, necklaces, arm-bands, rings, and earrings.*

Household boars, or tuskers, are unmarried boars who have hired on with a clan. They form the bulk of the clan armies, and aside from a small stipend from the clan matrons, they live off the plunder they seize from rival clans. While usually poor, a successful tusker can hope to catch the eye of a sow, perhaps a matron. A typical tusker usually hosts only about a half-dozen morrts, although certain successful tuskers can amass a larger trove of morrts which they usually give to their clan matrons as tribute. Tuskers aren't completely loyal, and occasionally drift away to another clan matron, especially if the matron is looking to swell the ranks of her clan.

Tuskers. All stats are 2D except: *Dexterity 3D, brawling parry 5D, melee combat 5D, melee parry 4D+1, thrown weapons 5D, Knowledge 1D, intimidation 3D, survival: Gamorr 4D, Mechanical 1D, Perception 1D, Strength 4D, brawling 6D, stamina 5D, Technical 1D, armor repair 3D. Ax (STR+2D), leather armor (+1D physical), 1-6 morrts, necklaces, arm-bands, rings, and earrings.*

Veterans are retirees, sometimes from great age, but much more commonly from being maimed or crippled in some fashion. Veterans are usually amazingly tough, experienced, and respected. They are the main trainers of young boars until they march off to war for the first time. Veterans serve as advisors to warlords, who respect them as they respect no other boars, and they often command the clan-guards. Veterans can be identified by the lack of an important body part and the dozen or so morrts they can boast.

Gamorrean boars do not trade, but sows will. Their main interest is in hand weapons or long-lasting food supplies, and they pay in gold or other precious metals, if they have it, or mercenary con-

GAMORREAN COLORATION AND PHYSICAL FEATURES

Most non-Gamorreans think of Gamorreans as physically very similar—they all look the same: squat, dark green, and heavy. Not so.

Most Gamorreans are a dark greenish, at least over most of their bodies, but skin coloration does vary, especially among females. Light-skinned, even two-tone Gamorreans are not uncommon. Boars seem to have a greater tendency to be dark, perhaps because they are out in the sun more. Brown, black, yellow, pinkish, and even a rare and exotic white are possible. Eye colors vary almost as much, with blue, gold-yellow, brown, and black eyes almost evenly distributed. These colorations mean very little to the Gamorreans, and they have no color-prejudices, although there are some superstitions about certain markings.

Not all Gamorreans are huge, heavy, and squat, either. Although the ideal is to be very large, there are some Gamorreans who are comparatively lean, light, and lanky. While they are not the most common body types, they do indeed exist.

tracts if they don't. The safest time to visit Gamorr is in the late fall through the early spring while the boars are comparatively calm, and the sows still flush from last season's plunder.

GAMORREAN ANIMISM

Gamorrean beliefs have become less superstitious in the last hundred years or so, as more contact with aliens have introduced them to fairly reliable technologies, but many of the old beliefs remain deeply rooted.

Gamorreans are animistic, believing that natural features, communities, battle sites, animals, and people have a lingering spirit that can affect the world. While everything is thought to have some kind of spirit, the only ones Gamorreans are really worried about are the ones powerful enough to be a threat. Huge trees, ancient fortresses, deep forests, giant fungi, famous long-dead heroes, the spirits of the murdered, and sites of massive slaughter are thought to be able to help or harm the living. Most of these associations are

apparently based on how the spirit's source affects Gamorreans. Tree and mountain spirits are thought to be mostly beneficial. Trees provide wood and mountains rock to build with, so they are generally good. This doesn't mean they can't be dangerous—sometimes trees decided to drop huge branches or fall on travelers, which is usually fatal. Mountains have a similar sense of humor, and shed landslides on unsuspecting Gamorreans.

Forest and sea spirits are regarded as unfathomable. Sometimes they leave travelers alone and let them pass, other times they get travelers lost. Forests like to shift their paths around and sometimes swallow passing parties whole. The ocean is very unpredictable, and is thought to send winds and currents when properly treated and storms when not. Even if it sends a wind or current, it may decide to take the sea-going traveler far out to sea or to the wrong section of coast, or just pull the boat into its watery jaws. Most Gamorreans don't like to travel on the ocean.

Ancient fortresses have very steady and powerful spirits and are very good. The fortress lends power to the muscles of defenders in wartime and fertility to the sows in slushtime and croptime.

Giant fungi house spirits of fertility, so much so that the really huge ones are avoided since they like to spray people with their offspring. Giant fungi are treated with respect, but from a distance.

Clan spirits are important to every tribe. Heroic warlords who fell in combat are invoked to bring power into battle, while famous warriors who fell defending a fortress are invoked to make the defenders stronger. The most important clan spirit is the clan founder, the original matron from whom all the others are descended. The founder spirit is believed to be very wise, sending dreams to the current clan matron to advise her in times of trouble.

The spirits of the murdered are greatly feared by most Gamorreans. Victims are thought to be angry at being killed by treachery and walk the land of the living during the night, seeking their murderer and slaying any they come across. A murder spirit can be fought and defeated by a living warrior, but they are thought to be exceptionally strong and dangerous. A surer way to lay a murder spirit to rest is to kill its murderer. Murder spirits are thought to be physical entities without extraordinary abilities like turning intangible or flying, and can be trapped in a room or left outside of a sturdy fortress.

Sites of massive and famous battles have their own collections of spirits. The fallen are thought to return on stormy winter nights

to refight their battles, sometimes causing great calamity to nearby settlements. Since many of these battles were fought near inhabited fortresses, storm damage is credited to these spirits, who usually remain invisible.

GAMORREAN RUNES

Gamorreans do have a primitive runic alphabet, useful for accounting, record keeping, genealogy, recording epic stories, and poetry. Almost all writing is done by educated sows. Boars are thought to be better suited to training for battle, although a fair number of boars can read slowly. There are several variations, but this example is typical:



■ PITTINS

Type: Pet Pest Predators

DEXTERITY 4D

Brawling parry 5D

PERCEPTION 3D

Search 4D

STRENGTH 2D

Brawling 5D

Special Abilities:

Teeth: Inflict STR+2D damage.

Claws: Cause STR+2D damage.

Move: 12

Size: 0.5 meters

Orneriness: 3D

Capsule: Pittins are pesters, pet carnivores kept to rid homes and businesses of vermin. Their world of origin is unknown. They have been domesticated for millennia, but are generally found on worlds where droid pest-units are impractical or non-existent. They also make good and loyal pets, although their owners are occasionally frustrated with their natural independence.

■ DWOOPS

Type: Draft animals

DEXTERITY 2D

PERCEPTION 2D

STRENGTH 3D

Lifting 4D, stamina 5D

Move: 10

Size: 1 meter long
Orderliness: 4D

Capsule: Dwoobs are small, semi-domesticated draft animals used on Gamorr. They are generally hitched to pull sleds in winter and early slushtime. Dwoobs are not a triumph of Gamorrean domestication, and are usually only used by skilled sled drivers. Most Gamorreans use wheel barrows to pack around large amounts of goods.

■ MORRTS

Type: Small topical parasites

DEXTERITY: 1D

PERCEPTION: +2

STRENGTH: +1

Special Abilities:

Bloodsuckers: +1 damage due to blood loss. Gamorreans are immune to this effect.

Move: 4

Size: 1–5 centimeters

Capsule: Morrts are small slug-like bloodsucking parasites that Gamorreans host as pets and status symbols. Gamorrean physiology is adjusted to host these parasites (a Gamorrean can host one morrt for every pip of *stamina*), but other species will lose -1 pip of *Strength* for every morrt attached. Morrts attach themselves painlessly. Their skin exudes a slime that acts as a local anesthetic, often used as the base of a local pain-killer. They usually remain in place until found visually, and can be easily detached by lifting them off by the tail.

Wild morrts are quite aggressive about attaching themselves to hosts, and group in clusters up to several dozen. A morrt swarm could easily drain a Gamorrean dry. Tame morrts are docile creatures, usually so fat from feasting on their host that they can barely move.

JUGSMUK STATION

Jugsmuk Station is a major port on Gamorr—a landing field with a cluster of pre-fabs and local longhouses abutting Jugsmuk Clanhome. The Jugsmuk clan matron realized years ago that outlanders had a great deal of wealth, and that fairs with outlanders around tended to be larger and richer. She had a large landing field cleared and extra longhouses built, and established a semi-permanent market. She has since become very wealthy with the additional taxes and tributes the Jugsmuk Station Fair brings in. The station is popular with off-world traders because they don't have to move around from fair to fair nearly as much. The station is, however, almost always subject to attack in wartime by the warlords of competing clans, who want the station land and resulting wealth. A high percentage of the Jugsmuk treasury goes to hiring tuskmer mercenaries.

The station is fairly typical of remote trading posts. Native-built structures mingle with imported pre-fabricated buildings. Traders of all species mix, haggle, and quarrel. The landing field is conveniently much closer to the fortress than any Imperial-legal field, a dangerous arrangement if someone loses control on approach. The station has no landing control, so pilots must bring their ships in “eyes out, hands on,” as pilot slang refers to landing with full sensors and without aid.

The station has a strong defensive perimeter with modern weapon emplacements—although the station and inhabitants are theoretically off limits in Gamorrean war, nobody really wants to test the theory, and in practice there are usually some over-enthusiastic tuskers who decide to raid it during the yearly sieges of Jugsmuk fortress. Summer is always a nervous time around the station.

Business is erratic, but decent. The station includes several businesses of note to the wayward traveler stuck on Gamorr.

The Irrational Number is the main local bar and inn, run by a Bith referred to as Numbers (Bith names being very hard for non-Bith to pronounce). Numbers runs a busy but organized place, with gambling in one corner, drinking in another, and an enzymer console with outdated Registry programming in a third, with rooms for rent upstairs. Usually the entertainment is recorded, but occasionally a hard-luck band passes through (as quickly as possible).

■ ENZYMER

Model: BioTech Mark 16 Enzymer

Type: Bio-identification unit and counter-agent producer

Skill: First aid

Availability: 1

Capsule: An enzymer is a device that grows and identifies biological residues and produces a counter-agent to known bacteria and viruses. The enzymer can only produce counter-agents to diseases and certain parasites.

Sheebareevadee's Emporium of Interstellar Goods is a shabby little general store and outfitter run by a Squibb merchant. Sheeb is positively lazy for a Squibb, and only runs fairly simple tradeswaps at best. He also accepts cash with only a little haggling, a decidedly un-Squibb-like attitude. Sheeb finds Gamorr deeply depressing, but lacks the drive to haggle away his store and leave.

Momma Reseros' Diner is a grease-ladle diner run by a female Chevin, Reseros Meh. Meh is a grumpy cook with few social graces, but she's fairly honest and hardworking. She doesn't like other

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Chevins much—actually, she doesn't really seem to like anybody very much. Her cooking is the closest thing to home-cooked that any non-Gamorrean can find on the planet, and she knows dozens of dishes involving mushrooms.

Game statistics and information on Gamorreans created by Timothy S. O'Brien based on Barbara Hambly's "Murder in Slushtime." Callista game information created by Floyd Wesel based on Darksaber and Children of the Jedi.

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The Breath of Gelgelar

By Jean Rabe

Illustrations by Brian Schomburg

The young Glarsaur stood on its hind legs at the base of a maugesh tree, its belly brushing up against the knotty trunk, its dark eyes trained on the large, plump reeho overhead. The bird was a precious bit of sunlight come to life—an orange and yellow splash amidst the neverending green of the swamp planet Gelgelar.

The reeho was oblivious to the young Glarsaur; it was watching the two dozen adults in the clearing a few meters away. Nearly the size of men, the Glarsaurs resembled common curly-tailed lizards, with human-like front limbs that ended in formidable claws. They were covered from their spiky pates to their webbed toes with dull green scales that rendered them essentially invisible in the foliage. Their undersides provided the only contrast—segmented plates, smooth and shiny and the shade of wet earth.

The Glarsaurs were arguing about the Sullustans living in the nearby farming settlement. They were hissing about where to lay



their traps and what to use as bait to lure the wide-eyed men into the embrace of the trees.

To the young Glarsaur intent on the orange bird, the discussion seemed meaningless. What did it matter what bait was used—fat monkeys, iquazards, crelnuts—food was food, with the exception of the beautiful reeho. The Glarsaur began to climb. Just under the bird's eyes were feathers as red as one of the planet's rare sunsets. Its beak was black as night, like its eyes, and its feet were gray, the color of the clouds that almost perpetually shielded the swamp world. The young Glarsaur decided to pluck the bird before eating it, keeping some of the striking feathers to affix to a spear.

"Kel!" the largest Glarsaur in the clearing bellowed. "Come down from the tree. Listen to our plan!"

The loud words startled the reeho, and it twisted its head about just in time to see the looming claw of the young Glarsaur. The bird screeched shrilly and dove from the branch, arcing well above the heads of the plotting reptile-men and over the pile of spears waiting to be used against the Sullustan mold farmers.

Faster, T'laerean mentally urged the reeho. Hurry. Fly faster.

The bird had to get back to the Sullustan settlement quickly, where T'laerean could use his newly-learned Force skills to separate his senses from the reeho's. His mind no longer divided, his senses all in one place, he could warn everyone about the Glarsaurs' plans. All the Sullustans would be safe. And he would be a hero.

Faster, he coaxed the reeho. From a small secret place he'd reserved for himself in the bird's mind, T'laerean watched the leaves and branches blur before the racing reeho. He felt the damp, humid air rush about bright orange feathers, heard the rapid thrum of the reeho's heart, and took in the earthy scents of the world. Fly much faster.

The Sullustan hadn't taken over the reeho, wasn't so much controlling it or forcing it to do his bidding as he was persuading it—entreating it to fly this way and help him. Through the Force he had joined his mind with the bird's, mentally hitchhiked along in a grand experiment, so he could see through its eyes and ears. It had been a game at first, a simple practice session, a chance to test his growing awareness of the Force, the *Breath of Gelgelar*, the Wise Man of Kooroo called it. But the game ended when T'laerean had spotted the Glarsaurs and eavesdropped on their malicious plans. The Wise Man would be so proud of him—attempting a feat to meld with a reeho! And his fellow Sullustans, well, they would honor him,

shower him with praise for saving them from the Glarsaurs.

T'laerean wasn't yet so skilled in the Force that he could release the meld with the reeho from this distance, from any distance. He needed to be in physical contact with the bird—or thought he did, which meant indeed he must be in contact for a separation to succeed. However, someday soon he would be so skilled—like his mentor. Soon he would be a master of the Force, able to join his senses with creatures at the edge of his vision, beyond his vision, and perhaps with the very plants that grew in profusion on the swamp world. Soon he would be able to let his mind wander around the Shrine of Kooroo, where he could spy on the pilgrims; drift toward the Great Shore Marshes, where the giant sea beasts dwelled; and then roam across all of Gelgelar.

Faster. That's it. Time for rest later.

He urged the reeho to angle its course upward until it cleared the top of the jungle canopy, to fly past the edge of the climax trees. Below, the steamy marsh plains stretched out. At the edge of the bird's vision the farming settlement came into view, with its stark and sterile interconnected metallic box-like buildings that seemed so out of place in the swampy wilderness.

T'laerean, like all the Sullustans in the settlement, knew the Glarsaurs were warlike, and the only sentient species—if they could be called that—native to Gelgelar. But he also knew the creatures weren't all that plentiful and that they usually kept to themselves. Until now, the reptile-men had been striking only when farmers took their vohis mold crops to the planet's spaceport, and didn't take enough guards or blasters with them for protection. Lately the farmers had been toting a good number of blaster carbines along, sizeable weapons that seemed enough of a threat to keep the reptile-men at a distance. But if the Glarsaurs were actually going to lure the Sullustans into the jungle, blasters would be next to useless. How could you shoot something you couldn't see, something invisible because it was the color of the ferns and bushes?

You're far beyond the Glarsaurs. They can't hurt you. But you must keep going so I can warn the people.

Why the reptile-men were so intolerant—hateful—of the Sullustans, and of the humans, Quarren, Twi'leks, and various other species who had settled the planet—was unknown. The people posed no threat to the Glarsaurs, hadn't taken land from them, and had even tried to befriend them. But all attempts to

establish peaceful relations had failed—though there were rumors that some of the creatures cooperated from time to time with the world's criminal elements. And why the reptile-men were plotting to lure Sullustans into the jungle to slay them was a mystery to T'laerean. Glarsaurs didn't eat Sullustans. Or did they?

See the Krevk Settlement fence? The glittery silver net around the buildings? We're close now. Faster.

There wasn't much known about the reptile creatures—other than that they were decidedly unfriendly. They moved so easily through Gelgelar's swamps, and the shvash gas that habitually and unpredictably erupted from the sodden ground never bothered them. The Glarsaurs didn't need to wear breath masks like the Sullustan mold farmers did. But neither did the reeho. The bird was used to breathing the noxious gas.

Through the reeho's eyes T'laerean spied a group of Sullustans a few hundred meters outside the fence. They were searching through the tall grasses—sensor packs trained on the ground, repulsorlift sleds filled with mold hovering along behind them. Looking for the last of the mold patches to harvest this season, no doubt, he thought. The farmers were not yet near enough to the trees to be threatened by the Glarsaurs. But T'laerean knew if they continued along this course, they soon would come close enough and might be lured in by the promise of tasty food. Crelnuts were hard to resist compared to the simple bland fare of the settlement. Only Gelgelar Free Port offered native Sullustan cuisine.

The reeho banked toward the west, away from the Sullustans.

No! T'laerean's mind gently scolded. The mold farmers will not hurt you. Fly past them, to the settlement. The shiny buildings. Toward the glittery net. His mental words were soothing, powered by the Force, and were enough to relax the reeho. It banked toward the east, past the farmers, entranced by the voice coming from a secret place in its mind. *That's it, T'laerean communicated. Now, toward the buildings, my orange friend.*

The young Sullustan felt the energy of the Force teasing his mind even as he talked to the reeho, felt the near-palpable and indescribable energy that permeated Gelgelar and everything else in the universe. He felt the Force control him, at the same time he was controlling it, and he felt its tendrils wrap around his consciousness. He worked with it, channeling it into another suggestion—as the Wise Man had taught him. He urged the reeho to pull its wings in closer to his body, to dive. Practically skimming the tall green

grass of the swampy plains now, the sun-colored reeho beat its wings even faster, carrying T'laerean's senses across a brook swollen by the recent heavy rains, closer to the settlement, then over the simple chain wall dotted with sensor units.

You are doing well, sun-reeho. I will reward you with seeds for your cooperation.

The Wise Man would arrive in the settlement next week, T'laerean knew, and would quickly learn of his student's accomplishments—his most promising student's grand accomplishments. *Perhaps the Wise Man will spend more time teaching me more powerful Force skills,* he thought.

The reeho banked over three young Sullustan women who were just inside the fence. They were playing a game of Yastesh with a group of chattering children. Toward the center of the settlement, a circle of old farmers sat beneath an overhang, their words too soft for the bird to hear. *Old tales,* T'laerean mused. *My news will give them a grand new story to tell.*

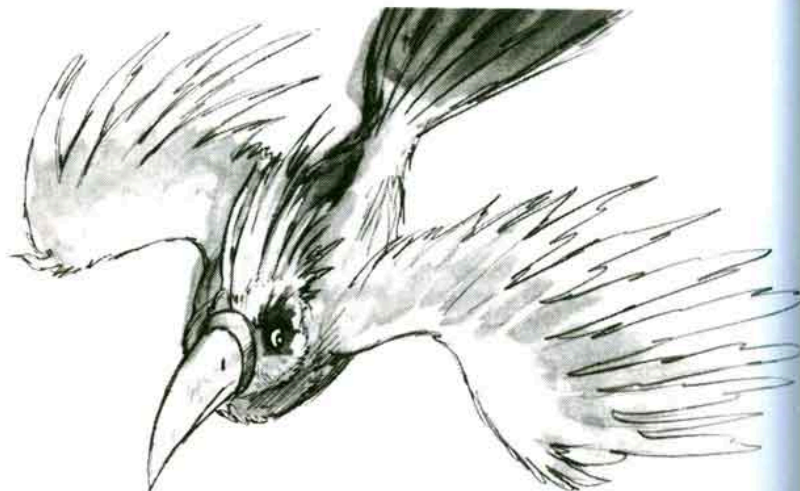
He formed another suggestion, and inwardly smiled as the bird darted toward a small building at the far end of the settlement—T'laerean's home, a hero's home. The Sullustan's body waited inside.

As the reeho sped toward an open window, two small girls, barely four or five, darted out from the shadows, laughing and tugging on each other's ears, their wide faces flushed from play. The tallest child spotted the reeho and oohed and ahed, stood on her toes and waggled her hands.

"Pretty reeho! Here pretty, pretty reeho!" she called, her high voice muffled slightly by the breath mask. Most parents made their children wear the masks outside—just in case a shvash gas cloud erupted in the vicinity. "Here pretty reeho! Come play with us!"

Ha! The young Glarsaur came much closer to catching the bird, T'laerean mused from his secret place. He had to admit the reeho must indeed look inviting, it had captured his attention when he was looking about for a creature to meld his senses with. Slipping above the heads of the children, the reeho flew through the open window of T'laerean's home and lit on the metal floor. As the bird's eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, it hopped toward the bed, its feet clicking against the metal tiles.

On the bed, T'laerean coaxed the reeho. *Fly on the bed. Touch the Sullustan. The man there who looks to be sleeping. Then I will let you be, no more voices in your head. You can fly back to the jungle. The*



bird moved closer, pausing only for a moment to pick up a small bit of crust T'laerean had dropped this morning. *Soon I will not need physical contact to make this work*, T'laerean thought. *Soon I will be strong enough in the Force that...*

"Pretty, pretty reeho!" The tallest child had entered through T'laerean's unlocked door and ran toward the bird, her arms outstretched.

On the bed! T'laerean's mind screamed. *Hurry!*

The reeho cast its head about this way and that, instantly frightened and looking between the prone form of the Sullustan and the charging girl. T'laerean could tell it considered the children every bit as much of a threat as the Glarsaurs.

On the bed! On the...no!

A piercing screech exploded from the reeho's throat, and T'laerean watched from his secret place in the back of the bird's mind as a basket was dropped over it. The other child must have climbed in through the window, used T'laerean's own basket to catch the reeho. The wicker was thick, but woven just loose enough in a few places so the terrified reeho could look out. Its small heart hammered wildly, sounding like rolling thunder to T'laerean.

"Oh, pretty reeho!" the tallest girl gushed with delight. "What a fine pet I have now."

"My pet, too, Raenyn," the other child said. "I caught him." She

dropped to the floor and peered between a tiny gap in the weave. "My pet. I will call him Sunshine!"

Pet, T'laerean fumed. *I am not a pet, I am a student of the Force, a student of the Wise Man of Kooroo. I am...* The pounding of the bird's heart made it difficult for the Sullustan to think. *Calm*, he urged the bird. *Relax*. But the pounding continued, and a raucous mix of sounds came out of the reeho's beak—irritating screeches and shrill screams.

Let the reeho out of here! T'laerean's mind cried. *Now what is this?*

The reeho had to hop as a piece of leng bark was pushed under the basket, creating a bottom to the prison. Then the bird and T'laerean felt the bark and the basket rising. The children were carrying the basket outside.

"Momma," the youngest called. "Look what we caught. A pretty pet named Sunshine!"

The basket was toted toward a Sullustan woman who was muddled from the mold fields. The reeho peered out at her, its heart slowing only because its fear had exhausted it. T'laerean instantly recognized her.

She was one of the settlement council members, someone who should be warned about the Glarsaurs' ambush.

"Oh, children. The bird cannot be a pet," the woman said.

T'laerean breathed a sigh of relief. She would release the reeho, he could coax the bird to land on



him, and he would use the Force to free his senses. He could warn her about the Glarsaurs and then....

"The bird can't be a pet when fresh treats like this are so hard to find outside the port. This will be a special meal for your father. I'll make reeho stew."

Dinner!

The link with T'laerean allowed the bird to grasp the woman's words. And despite its exhaustion, the bird started clacking and screeching louder, as if the threat of death injected life into it. It hopped about on the bark and made shrill, piercing noises—like a Thull whistle.

You can't kill me, T'laerean fumed. You know me! I am T'laerean, the hero. T'laerean, master of the Force! If you eat this bird, why... T'laerean panicked. He didn't know what would happen if the bird died. Would his senses return to his body—in which case his problem would be solved, though at the expense of the reeho. Or would his consciousness drift away, leaving his body a mindless shell? Would he die as the bird died? He had never practiced this Force ability before, only watched the Wise Man do something similar to it. He had never asked the Wise Man the possible outcomes, nor listened none-too-closely as the Wise Man explained exactly how everything worked. T'laerean had been interested only in the opportunity to merge his senses with something else.

The bird continued to screech, and T'laerean felt his fear matching its, his resolve melting like butter left on the table too long. *If you kill this reeho, it will be like eating one of your own kind! And maybe you'll have no one to warn you about the Glarsaurs. Maybe all the mold farmers will die! You could be sealing the fate of the entire settlement in the quest for one tasty meal!*

As the reeho was carried across the settlement and into the woman's home, he tried to channel his thoughts through the Force to quiet the creature, to get himself to relax so he could think more clearly. Panic begets disaster, the Wise Man once told him. T'laerean wished he had paid more attention to that lecture and the meditating techniques the old human showed him.

We will be free, he told the bird. *Do not worry. Do not panic. The Force is my ally and won't let us die. He hoped. We will escape to my home at the first chance, and then you will land upon my belly. I will release you, and as my senses return to my body you can return to the jungle—never to see this settlement again.* He pictured trees and the sky, and for an instant the bird's heart slowed and its spirit lifted.

But then the basket was deposited on a gleaming metal counter and the smells of spices filled the air. Through a gap in the wicker, the reeho saw more metal objects it couldn't put a name to or fathom what they were for. But T'laerean knew. They were pots and pans.

They were in the kitchen, and the woman was heating a bowl, pouring levsh oil into it! His own fears resurfaced tenfold, and the bird's heart raced again.

"There isn't enough of him to share with everyone," the woman told the little girls. "But it is your father's birthday soon. And he so loves reeho. We'll tell everyone how you caught this bird—both of you—as a present for your father. People will be proud of you. And your father will be so pleased."

"Can we keep the feathers?" the smallest asked.

"Of course."

"But Mama," the taller child, the one called Raenyn, wailed. "I want the reeho—as a pet. Please."

"No." The woman's voice was stern now, tinged with parental authority. "The next time we take a mold harvest into the port, next week maybe, we'll find you a pet. Something you can cuddle. A wilwog, perhaps, a trained one that doesn't shed and won't soil the floor. Now go out and play. And put your breath masks back on." She reached for a knife.

What can I do? I must do something. If she kills the reeho, the mold farmers might die. I might die, too. The reeho screeched again, and this time T'laerean didn't try to hush it. He was trying to shut out the reeho's heartbeats, concentrating on the woman, on the Force, wondering if perhaps he could influence her. The Wise Man could do it, T'laerean knew, persuade people to look the other way, to change their minds. If only he could change the woman's mind.

Let us go. He stretched the thought outward, like it was a leaf blowing on the breeze, blowing toward the woman. *Look at us! Let us go!* Maybe if she looked closely at the reeho, saw how truly beautiful the bird was, she would not be able to kill it.

She started humming an old Sullustan tune, adjusted the heat pad beneath the pan, then left the room. T'laerean urged the bird to look through another gap so he could see where she went. This time, however, the bird ignored him and began pacing about the basket walls, nipping in frustration at the wicker.

Look out a gap! I want to see!

The reeho thrust the persistent voice farther to the back of its

brain, far into the secret place, and clacked its beak open and shut over a strand of wicker. T'laerean felt the dryness of the strand, the sourness against the bird's black tongue, the uncomfortable roughness. The bird persevered while T'laerean floated, fuming, in that secret place, and within moments it had created a hole large enough to poke its head out. The reeho tried to force the rest of its body through the opening, then finally gave up and resumed chewing on the wicker.

Good friend, T'laerean praised, suddenly realizing what the bird was up to. *So smart. I should have thought of that. Reehos are notorious wood-chewers.* He decided he would tell the bird which strands to attack, which looked the weakest and would be the quickest to cut through, but his thoughts were smothered, pushed aside by the bird's own thoughts of escape. T'laerean continued to watch and worry and to feel the reeho's throat grow dry, its tongue and beak sore from the effort.

Then he heard the humming again, the woman returning. It grew muffled, as if she turned and entered another room. Her voice was



sweet, and under other circumstances T'laerean might have enjoyed it. The bird heard it too, worked faster, then it hopped back to survey its work. Big enough. The reeho edged forward and squeezed out of the prison. T'laerean felt the pressure of the jagged edges of the wicker that poked at the bird's sides.

Free! T'laerean was elated.

The bird screeched in excitement and jumped from the counter, spreading its wings and flapping madly. The dizzying scents of the spices and the heating oil flooded the bird's senses, and T'laerean fought to emerge from the secret place and again persuade the bird which direction to go.

Through the doorway, T'laerean urged. He was focusing on the Force now more than the bird, concentrating on the Breath of Gelgelar, working with the energy. He let it control him, and he asked it for some measure of control in return. *The doorway! Yes, that's it, my friend. Free! Free!*

The bird flew through the kitchen doorway, through a study and over a dehumidifying unit and computer console. Toward another doorway, one open just wide enough, opening more—the way outside!

Free! Free! No!

The door opened wider still and the bird flapped madly, rushing forward and slamming into the chest of Raenyn. The impact startled the child and dazed the bird. It flopped on the ground, stunned, unable to comply with T'laerean's cries to run away.

"Pretty reeho!" Raenyn cooed, scooping him up and calling to the smaller child. "You are not supposed to be loose," she gently scolded the reeho. "You are supposed to be dinner for Papa."

She held the reeho tightly and carried him through a side doorway, one that led to a small room with two narrow beds and a desk between them. Sitting unceremoniously on the closest bed, Raenyn roughly patted the reeho's head. The other child sat next to her.

"Is he hurt?"

"It doesn't matter." Raenyn held the reeho up and stared in its round blinking eyes. Her hands were not nearly large enough to fit all the way around the bird. "Mama is going to kill him and cook him in the stew. I don't think I can eat a bite of him, though. He's too pretty."

The reeho kept blinking and T'laerean tried to focus. The impact with the child had rattled his senses, too, and he saw two of each

of the young girls. Two of everything.

"She will pull out all his feathers," Raenyn continued. "You cannot eat feathers."

"He will not be so pretty then. I won't eat a bite of him either. I wanted him to be a pet."

"I wonder if he is someone's pet?" Raenyn lessened her grip on the bird just a little. "If he was someone's pet, Mama couldn't cook him."

T'laerean felt for the Force, let it surround his mind like the marsh surrounded the settlement. Again he tried to clear his vision, saw the smaller girl purse her lips.

"He might be T'laerean's pet, the odd boy who doesn't farm mold," she suggested. "I saw him with a pretty reeho this morning. Maybe this one. We caught it in his house, after all."

"T'laerean? The Wise Man of Kooroo's student?"

The smaller girl nodded.

"T'laerean would not have pets," Raenyn said firmly. "The bird flew in through the window. We saw it. T'laerean is strange and unfriendly. He cares only about the Force, talks only about the Force and impressing the crazy old Wise Man. He would not care about a little bird or anything else. He only wants to be important."

T'laerean cringed. *Care only about the Force? Is that what people think? Of course I care about the Force. But I care about this settlement, too. About the people in it. I'm trying to save the mold farmers!*

"Besides," Raenyn continued. "T'laerean is dead. I saw him when we caught the bird. Dead in his bed. Dead. Dead. Dead. Even if the reeho is his pet—was his pet—it wouldn't matter. Dead people can't have pets."

"Maybe we should tell someone that T'laerean's dead."

"No. Then we would get in trouble for sneaking into his house and finding him. Let someone else find him and get in trouble. He's not going anywhere, after all. He's dead."

A soft clacking noise came out of the reeho. The bird was still frightened. But it was tired and thirsty, too. So very thirsty. Its black tongue was dry and was becoming swollen. It looked up at Raenyn and cocked its head.

"Poor reeho," the girls said practically in unison.

The smaller girl started to cry. "We just can't let Momma kill him."

From beyond the doorway, the reeho heard humming, the woman's voice again. It was distant, signaling she was deeper in the house.

"No!" the woman hollered, her words sounding soft, but clear.



"The reeho escaped! Chéwed his way out. Girls! Come help me find him. He's probably still in the house. Girls!"

The girls glanced at each other, grins spreading wide across their wide Sullustan faces. Then T'laerean felt the reeho stiffen, fight to break free, saw a darkness looming before the bird, felt the bird being stuffed inside a sack. The reeho opened its beak to screech, and T'laerean concentrated with all his might. *Quiet!* he pleaded. *Be quiet and we might get free!*

"Mama thinks he escaped," Raenyn whispered. "We will keep him hidden. Then she will not kill him and we can share him as a pet."

The younger one made a ts-ktsk noise. "You can't keep a reeho in a sack. He will make noise, unless he becomes dead like T'laerean. And if Mama finds him—alive or dead—we will be in trouble."

"And the bird will be dinner."

"But maybe we can keep him in someone else's home."

"Who's home?" It was Raenyn speaking.

"T'laerean's, of course. He's dead and doesn't need his home."

"But someone will find out he's dead and we will be in trouble and then we won't be able to use his home for the reeho."

"No one will find out if we bury T'laerean tonight, when no one is watching, when they think we're asleep. It's already starting to get dark outside anyway."

Raenyn softly giggled. "We could borrow Papa's shovel. But let's go to T'laerean's now, hide the reeho. We'll go back after dark to bury T'laerean. If the reeho screeches in T'laerean's home, no one will hear him."

"Well, they might hear him, but they won't pay attention. Everyone thinks T'laerean's weird."

T'laerean felt the bird being jostled, its fear rising to a fever pitch, and he suspected the girls were running. He heard doors open and close, sounds he knew but sounds that were alien to the terrified reeho. The jiggling and jarring sensation continued for several minutes, though it felt like an eternity, more doors opening and closing. Then he felt himself falling, landing abruptly and uncomfortably on something hard. The reeho shivered and picked itself up, stood in the cramped and dark confines of the sack and examined its wings and claws. T'laerean could tell that nothing was broken, though everything felt like it was bruised. The bird ached all over, and he tried to offer words that might comfort it.

But the reeho thrust T'laerean's thoughts to the secret place in its mind again and started pecking at the bottom of the sack, like a si-hen would peck at the ground for grain. Any movement seemed to cause the reeho additional pain, but it persisted, pecking faster when a bit of leather came loose in its beak.

"No, pretty reeho," Raenyn scolded. "Stop that. You will ruin my sack."

That is the idea, T'laerean thought. The reeho intends to ruin your sack—just like you are trying very hard to ruin our lives.

Again the bird was lifted inside the sack, its escape thwarted. Raenyn shook the bag as she untied it and thrust her hands into the darkness. She grabbed the orange reeho as the sack fell away, and she held it about the back, pinning its wings to its sides. It tried to bite her, but she had gripped it carefully enough so the bird's beak couldn't reach her small fingers.

Out in the open, the reeho could breathe again. It saw the Sullustan laying on the bed nearby. The Sullustan it remembered it was supposed to fly upon. The reeho relaxed in the girl's grip. T'laerean sensed it was conserving its strength, waiting. Her fingers

opened a little. Then a little more.

Let her think you are docile, he urged the reeho. Let her think you are wounded—which you are, unable to fly—which you are not. When she drops her guard, you will fly to the bed and....

The reeho again thrust T'laerean's thoughts aside, pushed off from the girl's opening hands and spread its wings. It flew through the open window and out into the growing twilight. It beat its wings hard, and ignored the ache in its body. It ignored the cries of the girls running behind it, their frantic footsteps. It ignored the old men who were going into their homes for dinner.

No! You're flying the wrong way! Fly back into the building! Land on the Sullustan—the one on the bed!

And it ignored T'laerean.

The reeho, though tired and sore, flew as fast as its aching wings could manage. It streaked across the settlement yard, then over the glittering fence and across the swampy plains. The bird's keen vision cut through the growing darkness, like a sharp knife could cut through a crelnut. And from the secret place in the back of the reeho's mind, T'laerean watched with growing terror. The Sullustan's awareness was being carried farther away from the settlement. He felt the Force, the Breath of Gelgalar, and he sensed that it was controlling him completely. He wasn't strong enough to exert any measure of control over it. His mind was careening along toward the trees, piggybacked onto the brain of the freed reeho.

How long can I live this way? In a reeho's mind? T'laerean wondered. Will they bury my body, ending my life? Or will my body die for lack of food and water? Will my consciousness drift forever in this small brain? When the bird sleeps, will I gain the strength to coax it to do my bidding again? And what about the farmers?

The bird spotted the Sullustan mold farmers, now using large glow rods to see by. Sensor packs still trained on the ground, datapads recording the yield, they were close to the trees now. And they were closing on a trio of iquazards, massive boarlike creatures that had been cleverly hobbled to tree roots.

The reeho idly wondered why anyone would tie the iquazards, and ignored T'laerean's attempts to explain about the ambush and make suggestions that it somehow warn the mold farmers. The reeho wanted only to return to the embrace of the jungle, to the safety of the tall tress, to never see Sullustans again.

"Look!" T'laerean faintly heard from his small, secret place. "Iquazards! Three of them, and they don't seem to notice us." It was

one of the mold farmers talking. "Everyone, come on. They move slow. We'll catch them and have a fine feast tonight."

The farmers would have to get close to the beasts, T'laerean knew. The iquazards were so thick-skinned they could virtually ignore blaster shots, except from close range. And close range would be too close to the jungle.

T'laerean heard the swish of the marsh grass behind the reeho, the snap of a dry twig. And through his shared senses he smelled the Sullustans, the vohis mold, the musky iquazards, the heady loam of the looming jungle. Darkness and green filled his vision as the bird swooped over the backs of the iquazards and darted between the trunks of two willotum trees and glided into the jungle.

Then a brighter green appeared, scaly and slick, and right in front of the bird. Black reptilian eyes locked onto the startled reeho. A young Glarsaur rose from behind a thick clump of ferns—the one who tried to catch the bird several hours ago. The Glarsaur rose and started toward the reeho, flailing its claws and clacking its jaws.

The reeho screeched, an irritating sound now so very familiar to T'laerean. The bird banked away, retreating through the same gap in the willotum trees, heading back over the iquazards and toward the swampy plains.

The young Glarsaur followed, disregarding the cries of the older Glarsaurs in waiting—the curses that the ambush would be revealed. The young Glarsaur thrashed forward, intent on the reeho that it had been denied earlier, thrashed forward past the iquazards and into the path of the oncoming mold farmers.

"Glarsaurs!" one of the mold farmers bellowed. "Run! I'll cover you."

From his secret place T'laerean watched the mold farmers turn and sprint toward the settlement, their repulsorlift sleds filled with mold trailing behind them. One held his position for a moment, aiming a blaster in the vicinity of the iquazards and laying down a line of suppression fire to keep the band of now-revealed Glarsaurs from pursuing.

T'laerean watched the mold farmers melt into the darkness, heard the squeals of the disturbed iquazards, smelled the air tinged with the heat of blaster fire, felt a claw dig into the reeho's side.

The young Glarsaur pulled the bird in close to its body, and T'laerean picked up the reptile-man's foul, sickly sweet breath. The Sullustan was only vaguely aware of the continuing curses of the

adult Glarsaurs; he was more intent on the orange bird's pain as feather after feather was plucked. Then the Glarsaur bit into the bird, and T'laerean's world turned into agony and darkness.

"T'laerean. Wake up." The voice sounded weak at first, wobbly with age. But it was persistent. "Do not die, T'laerean."

The young Sullustan's eyes felt matted shut, but he forced them open and blinked. A little girl's blurry face hovered inches from his; Raenyn's. And beyond her was the wrinkled human face of the Wise Man of Kooroo.

"I thought he was dead," Raenyn announced. "Dead. Dead. Dead. I thought we would have to bury him and would never be able to tell him about the Glarsaur ambush and about how my father used his blaster to fight them all off. About how my father is a hero to the whole settlement, saved everyone. And..."

"Do not chatter so, little one," the Wise Man cautioned. "T'laerean has been through a great ordeal, it seems, a sickness perhaps. Or something more. And he nearly did leave us. But I think he will be all right now. The Force will continue to heal him."

The old human leaned over T'laerean, helped him up.

Glancing around, the Sullustan could see that he was home, on his bed. Pale light streamed in through an open window, hinting it was morning. His throat was dry, and he was quick to accept the glass of water Raenyn offered. His belly felt empty.

"It was a good thing I came to the settlement earlier than I had planned," the old man began. "I stopped by to see you and found you close to death. If the Force was not so strong in you, I suspect I could not have saved you."

"Perhaps the Force is strong in me," T'laerean answered after a moment. "But I am not yet so strong in it."

"You are most wise to know you have limitations," the old man said, his eyes narrowing almost imperceptibly. "Rest, my student. You need more rest—time for more reflections. We'll resume your lessons tomorrow."

"I have a lot to learn," T'laerean whispered. The young Sullustan relaxed, closed his eyes, and listened to the retreating footsteps of Raenyn and the Wise Man. Eventually he allowed sleep to claim him, and he dreamed of Glarsaurs and iquazards, and a colorful orange bird that would forever haunt a secret place in his mind.



Roleplaying Game Statistics

■ T'laerean Larn

Type: Sullustan Student of the Force

DEXTERITY 3D

Blaster 3D+2, dodge 4D, parry 4D, running 4D+2

KNOWLEDGE 2D

Alien species 3D+1, cultures 3D, languages 3D+2

MECHANICAL 2D+2

Communications 3D, repulsorlift operation 3D+2

PERCEPTION 3D

Bargain 4D, con 4D, hide 4D+1, persuasion 5D, search 3D+2

STRENGTH 2D

Climbing/jumping 3D+1, lifting 3D, stamina 3D

TECHNICAL 2D+1

Blaster repair 3D, first aid 4D

Special Abilities:

Force Skills: Control 2D, sense 2D

Control: Accelerate healing, concentration

Sense: Life sense, magnify senses, merge senses

Enhanced Senses: Sullustans get +2D to *Perception* or *search* rolls involving vision in low-light conditions or hearing.

Location Sense: Sullustans get +1D to *astrovation* if familiar with the area, and cannot get lost if they have visited an area before.

This character is Force-sensitive.

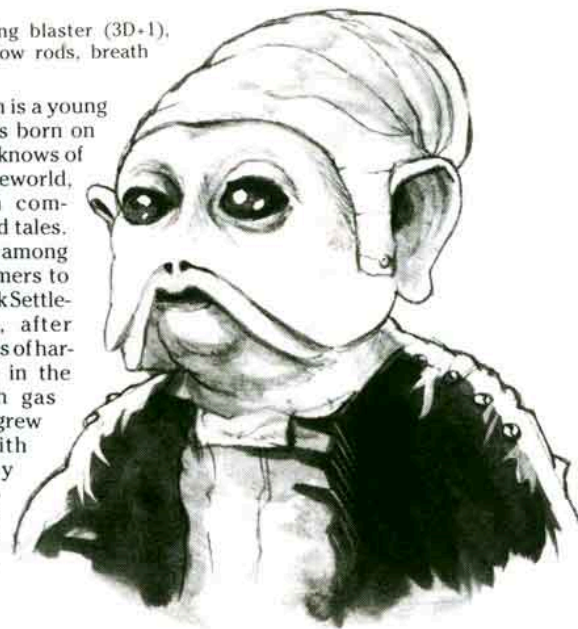
Force Points: 2

Character Points: 6

Move: 10

Equipment: Sporting blaster (3D+1), datapad, several glow rods, breath mask

Capsule: T'laerean is a young Sullustan who was born on Gelgelar and only knows of his people's homeworld, Sullust, through computer datafiles and tales. His parents were among the first mold farmers to establish the Krevk Settlement. However, after nearly two decades of harvesting the crop in the midst of shvash gas eruptions, they grew disheartened with the work. They opted to return to Sullust, but T'laerean refused to go with them.



He had met an old human in the Gelgelar Free Port—the Wise Man of Kooroo. The old human sensed a bit of the Force in young T'laerean and accepted him as a pupil. T'laerean's parents, in turn, accepted their son's decision to stay behind and left him their settlement house.

Though the Wise Man is not a Jedi or especially skilled in the Force, he knows enough abilities and philosophy to pass them on to T'laerean. And he recognizes that the young Sullustan needs to learn patience and restraint, as much as he needs to learn about the Force.

T'laerean is rambunctious and eager to throw himself into his studies, becoming frustrated when the Wise Man is not around often enough to suit him. He has dreams of one day becoming a Jedi Knight, and suspects he will have to leave Gelgelar to accomplish that. To that end, he makes occasional forays to the Free Port, hoping to spot individuals with lightsabers strapped to their hips.

Gelgelar

If you're looking for more information on the soggy planet of Gelgelar, the Free Port there, or the Wise Man, check out *Platt's Starport Guide*.

■ Glarsaurs

Attribute Dice: 12D
DEXTERITY 2D/4D
KNOWLEDGE 1D/3D
MECHANICAL 1D/2D
PERCEPTION 2D/4D+2
STRENGTH 2D/4D
TECHNICAL 1D/2D

Special Abilities:

Bite: A Glarsaur's bite does STR+1D+2 damage

Claws: Claw attacks do STR+1D damage

Move: 10

Size: 1-1.5 meters tall

Capsule: The only native sentient creatures on the swamp planet Gelgelar, Glarsaurs are known for not getting along with anyone. They are brutish and warlike, highly aggressive and carnivorous—and they seem to be perpetually hungry.

They stand a meter to a meter and a half tall and are covered with small green scales that resemble leaves. Their coloration helps them to blend into the Gelgelar foliage, rendering them practically invisible until they strike. They are cold-blooded and muscular, and they are adept at using their claws or fashioning crude weapons such as spears and clubs.

Though dull-witted, they are not without the ability to make plans and set ambushes. And they have been known, from time to time, to work with some of Gelgelar's criminal element—stopping vohis mold shipments from reaching the port city in exchange for particularly tasty

hunks of meat and not-so-crude weapons.

Some of Gelgelar's settlers, primarily the humans and Sullustans, have tried to communicate with the creatures and establish at least a tenuous relationship. While the Glarsaurs are capable of reasoning, they have shown no desire to be reasoned with, and have on more than one occasion attacked the individuals trying to befriend them.

Typical Glarsaur Warrior. *Dexterity 2D+2, dodge 4D+2, Perception 2D, hide 5D, search 4D, Strength 2D+2, brawling 4D+2.* Special abilities: bite does STR+1D+2; claws do STR+1D damage. Move 10.

New Sense Power

Merge Senses

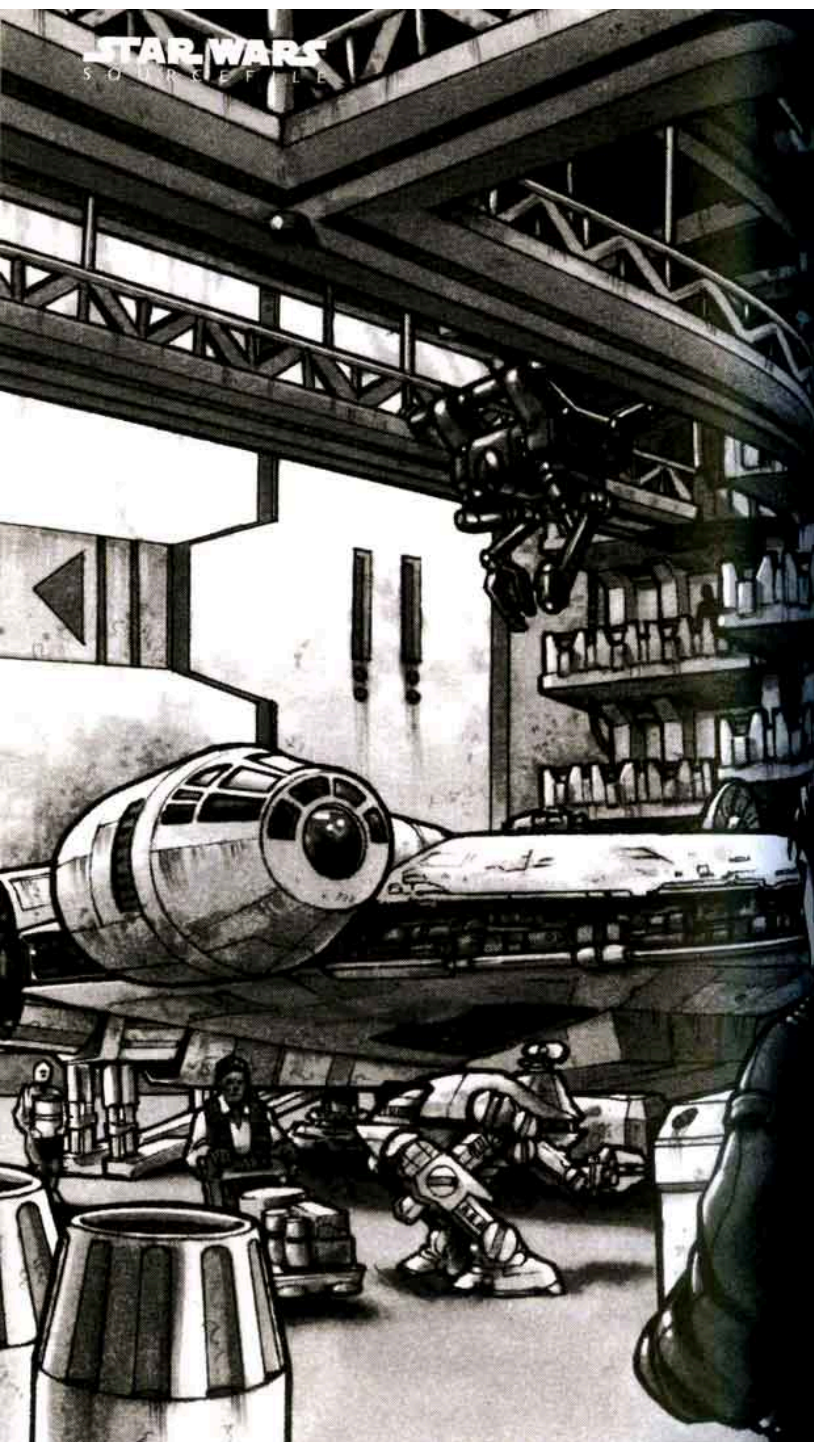
Sense Difficulty: Moderate. Modified by proximity.

Time to use: Three rounds.

Required power: *Magnify senses*

Effect: This power allows a Force user to perceive things through the senses of another creature, one with animal intelligence or less. He can see through the eyes of the selected creature, enjoying the benefits or being bound by the restrictions of the creature's vision. He can hear through the creature's ears; smell what the creature smells; and physically feel whatever the creature is feeling. The Force user does not control the creature, but can make suggestions. The simpler or less threatening the request, the more likely it will be agreed to. If a suggestion goes against the nature of the creature or would put it in an obviously hazardous situation, the Force user must make a *sense* roll against the subject's *willpower*. Failure means the suggestion is ignored.

While the Force user's senses are merged with a creature's, the Force user's body is motionless, its senses unable to function until, of course, the meld is broken. Releasing the target creature requires a Moderate roll. The link with the creature is also broken by the death of either the creature or the Force user. If the creature suffers damage or dies during a meld, the Force user suffers one-half the amount of damage.



STAR WARS
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STAR WARS
Adventure Journal • August 1997

SPECIAL OPS: DROP POINTS

By John Beyer & Kathy Burdette

Illustrations by Christopher Trevas

It had started to rain again. Colonel Stijhl knew it, even though he was in his office, because he smelled ozone and shvash gas coming from the hangar, and he wondered vaguely why the blast doors were open.

"Um...Colonel? Something bad just happened."

Stijhl looked up from the cargo manifests and shipping schedules neatly stacked on his desk. Kovings stood in the doorway, fumbling with his headset.

"What is it, Kovings?" Stijhl asked, not really interested. Kovings, who doubled as communications and deck officers, was a high-strung boy who panicked about everything.

"I just gave landing clearance at Ready-One to a light freighter," Kovings said.

"And?"

"It's registered as *The Maker*. The call-sign belongs to a Major T'Charek—"

Stijhl dropped his datapad. He finished Kovings' sentence. "Haathi."

"That's right."

Stijhl felt his neck pulsing.

"Sir?" Kovings was white now.

Special Ops: Drop Points

"Yes, Kovings." The colonel was about to put his head on the desk, but with Kovings watching, he just ran his hands over his thinning crew cut and took a deep breath.

"I should have said 'no' to her request, right?" asked Kovings, backing cautiously towards the door.

"No, it's okay. You shouldn't have said 'no.'"

Kovings smiled as if he'd just gotten a field promotion.

"You should have opened fire," said Stijhl.



Inside *The Maker*, Morgan was at work in a cramped maintenance alcove trying to fix the power grid. There was barely enough space for her to fit her entire body into the room; she stood almost halfway out the door, staring at the monitors, listening to the whirring sound of some piece of machinery which had activated itself somewhere amidst the crates. Morgan found it relaxing and closed her eyes.

While Morgan stood racking her brains in her own darkness, her life signs were being assessed. The killer amidst the crates prepared to eliminate them.



Alliance Drop Points

Scattered across the known galaxy in obscure locations and out-of-the-way places, secret meeting sites and weapon caches aid the Rebellion in its desperate fight against the Imperial war machine. Called "drop points," these locations are essential to most covert missions, allowing Special Operations teams to remain in the field for months at a time.

The Alliance High Command recognizes the importance of establishing drop points, and goes to great efforts to maintain their security. It has become the duty of all Alliance members to learn about drop point operations and to respect their proper use. Failure to do so may result in the sacrifice of hard-to-obtain resources and the irreplaceable loss of lives.

Alliance High Command has charged the department of Ordinance and Supply (OaS) with the duty of establishing and oversee-

ing drop points. In a program not unlike the Quartermaster Corps of the Old Republic Army, OaS has begun to post high-ranking supply officers and their staff members to front-line positions so that they may better interact with the teams. Using their superb organizational skills and talents, these field officers have already made significant changes in previous operational procedures. By establishing a series of drop point protocols and stocked equipment caches, Special Ops teams can now be quickly restocked with a larger variety of weaponry and support.

Fleet Intelligence officers also use drop points as field offices, allowing for faster transfer of intelligence reports and mission assignments. Whenever possible, both pre- and post-mission briefings are conducted, temporarily transforming the drop points into mobile command bases. Information flows both ways, which allows the Alliance to collect a great deal of knowledge regarding local Imperial activity—and to stay abreast of the larger Rebel efforts. The coordination of the times and sites of potential drop points has made it possible to brief several teams simultaneously, resulting in an increased number of joint missions and operations backed with fleet support.



"Atten-hut!" Haathi shouted.

At Haathi's order, Jayme exaggerated an attention stance. Nord panicked and did it for real. Stijhl came up the ramp and cringed.

"Knock it off," he said.

Haathi offered the Colonel her hand.

"Major Haathi," he said, shaking it. "Major T'Charek Haathi."

"It's nice to see you again, Colonel," said Haathi.

"Yeah, right. Who did you bring with you?"

"This is my executive officer, Captain Ivhin Jayme. I stole him from the urban commandos."

Jayme, a dark, wiry man, gave the Colonel's hand a solid but brief shake.

"And over here is Exalted Lord Dren Nord of Alliance Grand High Command," said Haathi.

"Captain Nord," Nord told him, stepping in front of Haathi. "I'm a doctor."

"Doctor Nord?" said Stijhl. "Didn't I see you on a Mon Cal cruiser near Ryloth?"

"Yes, sir! I was chief of surgery then."

"And what are you now?"

"He's my corpsman," Haathi said.

"You went from being chief of surgery on a capital ship to dusting off these weirdoes?"

Nord went a little pink. "It's always good to test one's limits, sir."

Haathi had already found Nord's. His first mission with the team was acquiring *The Maker*, and he had nearly gotten everybody killed. But she didn't mention that to Stijhl; the main reason she had come was to show off her promotion and her new ship. Although she was disappointed to find that Stijhl wasn't a major himself anymore.

"Sir," said Nord, "permission to disembark?"

"Oh, granted, I guess," said the Colonel. Nord filed past the others and clambered unsteadily down the entry ramp.

Stijhl commenced pacing slowly in front of Haathi and Jayme. "So," he said, watching his boot-tips as he walked. "Just happened to be in the neighborhood?"

Jayme gave a slight snicker. Stijhl looked up.

"Something funny, Captain?"

"Asthma," Haathi said, jabbing her elbow into Jayme's ribcage.

Stijhl stopped in front of Haathi and stuck his face right into hers.

"Tell me why you came here."

"Oh, sir," said Haathi, clasping her hands together, "not the mind-probe!"

"I knew it! You came here to upset me!"

"No, we need supplies! We just got back from an acquisition run."

Stijhl gave a low sigh. Then he pulled a comlink out of his belt. "Pendower, would you come up here?"

In a couple of moments a dark-haired woman wearing a green day-suit and holding a datapad came striding up the entry ramp. She wasn't much taller than Haathi or Jayme, but with her straight, almost regal posture she fairly towered over the permanently-slouched Stijhl.

"Get me an inventory, Pendower," he said to her.

"Surely," Pendower typed rapidly on the datapad.

"This is Major Haathi and Captain Jayme, by the way. Special Ops."

"Juuust a second," Pendower said, holding up a finger and still typing with three. "Okay, and what is it you need, Major?"

"We need, ah, some glow rods," said Haathi.

"Medpacs," said Jayme at the same time.

Pendower looked up. Her eyes were gray, reminiscent of Gelgalar's murky atmosphere, but darker, and with a sharpness to them.

"Which is it?" she asked.

"Medpacs," said Jayme in his deep, smoky voice, as he sat down on the lounge sofa and put his boots on.

"And how many of you are there?"

"Four," said Haathi.

"Four?" asked Stijhl. "I only met three of you."

"Our techie is working on a faulty power grid. She said to tell you 'hi.'"

"Where is your corpsman?" Pendower asked.

"Didn't you pass him on your way into the ship? If you squint, he looks like Mon Mothma in pants."

Just then Morgan's raspy voice came over the ship's intercom.

"Hey, Cap'n!"

"Morg, for the billionth time, I'm a major."

"Are you ready for this? Brace yourselves."

"Yeah, okay, Morg, we're braced."

"Good, because I think the—"

There was a sharp blast of static from the intercom and the whole ship went dark. Two seconds later, the red emergency lighting kicked on.

"Morgan!" Haathi called. "What just happened?"

The intercom was dead. Haathi and Jayme locked eyes for a long, paralyzed second; Pendower shoved past them all and ran down the corridor toward the rear maintenance bay.

Jayme looked down the corridor after Pendower.

"Go," Haathi told him. "I'll get Nord."



Maglenna Pendower's heart knocked so hard against her chest that her arms shook. Near the power core, the red lighting was in a permanent flicker—combined with the hot smell of the various metals and oils, it gave the illusion that something was on fire. She took a deep breath, stepped into the maintenance alcove, and glanced around.

It was a very small room with big, looming crates taking up most of the space. To Maglenna's right was a steel wall studded with monitors and glowing fixtures, many of them drizzling sparks. She

glanced at the schematic on her datapad—yes, *that's the power grid*. Just as she confirmed this, she extracted the smell of burnt flesh from the other odors in the room, and caught sight of Morgan.

It wasn't hard to figure out what had happened: Morgan had been electrocuted by the grid and thrown against the bulkhead. At the moment, she was lying over the grillwork on the floor, clutching a half-melted hydrosponder.

Maglenna reached around the doorway and pulled a grounding rod out of its emergency box on the wall. "Morgan?" she said, gently tapping Morgan's shoulder with the insulated rod. "Are you all right?"

Maglenna's red reflection peered back from Morgan's welding goggles. The display at the tip of the rod said "negative"; Maglenna tossed it aside and palpated Morgan's cartoid pulse with her bare hand. Nothing. She had expected this, but her stomach lurched all the same. The girl couldn't even be twenty years old yet.

Maglenna got halfway out of the alcove with Morgan before Jayme appeared at the bulkhead door and took over. He pulled Morgan out into the repair bay, ripped her jacket open, and immediately started pumping at her chest. "Get help," he told Maglenna.

"I'm it," she said, pulling her medic ident-card out of her sleeve pocket.

Jayme looked up and focused on the card without stopping what he was doing.

She said, "Get me a medpac with a defib strip and a scanner. You can find one at the north end of—"

Jayme nodded at the locker array, at the base of which sat a deluxe medical backpack.

Maglenna absently retrieved it. Hadn't they said they needed...?

The scanner confirmed her suspicions—ventricular fibrillation. No point in arguing about medpacs. Maglenna peeled off Morgan's goggles and got the pressure resuscitator affixed to Morgan's face, held her jaw open while the decompression tube automatically located her trachea and fed into her lungs.

"Okay," Maglenna said, affixing an adrenaline patch to Morgan's neck and offering Jayme a thin package with her free hand. "This is an adhesive defib strip. It's got to conduct a signal across her chest, from this shoulder to just over the heart. Put it on her and get clear."

Jayme peeled the strip off its backing and positioned it where Maglenna had indicated. The two of them scooted away as the

Gelgelar

Type: Terrestrial
Temperature: Cool
Atmosphere: Type II (breath mask suggested)
Hydrosphere: Saturated
Gravity: Standard
Terrain: Ocean, plains, wetlands
Length of Day: 30 standard hours
Length of Year: 287 local days
Sapient Species: Human, Quarren, Sullustans, Twi'leks, various other aliens
Starport: Limited services
Population: 10,000
Planet Function: Agriculture, criminal haven, trade
Government: Anarchy
Tech Level: Space
Major Exports: Shvash gas, vohis mold
Major Imports: Foodstuffs, high technology, starship parts

Capsule: Cloud-covered Gelgelar is a backwater planet providing a home to several thousand mold farmers, gas harvesters, and an increasing number of criminals and down-on-their-luck spacers. Shvash gas permeates the atmosphere; while it's not immediately toxic, it can cause severe nausea and unconsciousness. Breath masks are recommended.

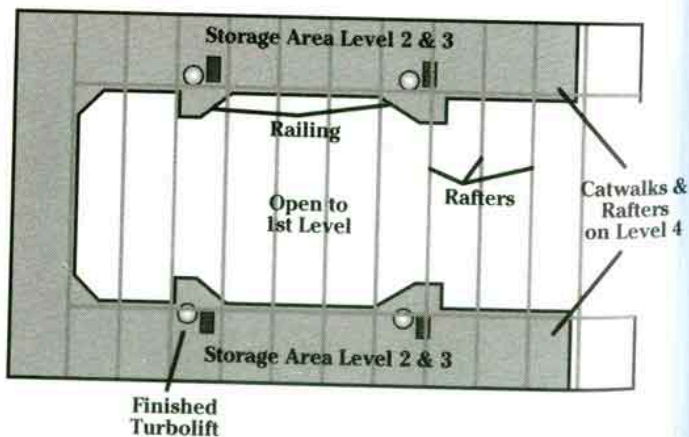
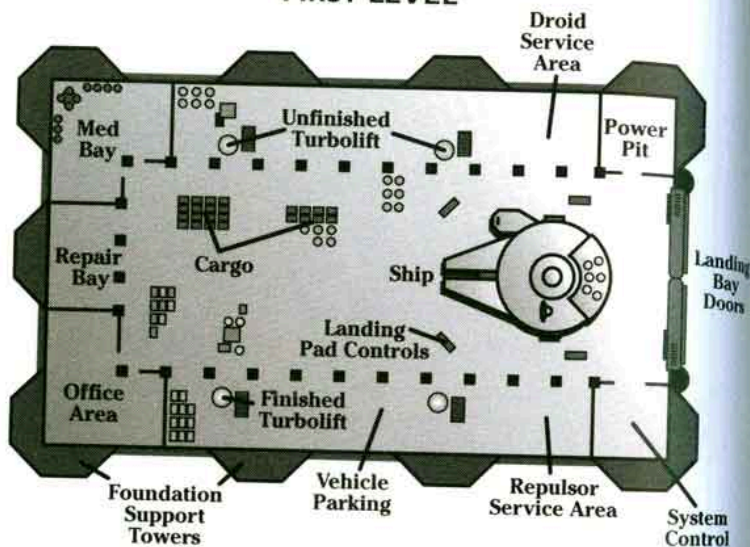
Gelgelar Free Port

System: Gelgelar system, Gelgelar
Starport Type: Standard class
Traffic: Slow
Control: Controller
Landing: Controller
Docking Areas: Landing platforms, docking warehouse
Docking Fee: 10 to 50 credits per local day for landing platform, 200 credits per local day for warehouse
Customs: None
Services: Food, lodging, repair facilities, spacer documents

Capsule: Gelgelar Free Port is chiefly run by an enterprising Sullustan named Loro Ecls and his rather extensive family. Offering numerous services, Ecls acts as the starport's unofficial mayor and protector of the economy. Recently, the Sullustan family's economic control of the free port has been challenged by Slerog Fenn, a greedy Rodian with criminal connections. Fenn's latest money-making schemes include the transformation of an aging warehouse into a secure landing bay able to accommodate light freighters. Eventually, the Rodian plans to offer starship repair facilities rivaling those of Loro Ecls. (For more detailed information consult *Platt's Starport Guide*, pages 58–78.)

Gelgelar Drop Point Warehouse

FIRST LEVEL



LEVELS 2, 3 & 4

device activated itself. An electric signal shot through Morgan's body, and she convulsed once. Twice. Three times. Four.

The light on the side of the resuscitator turned green. "She's breathing on her own, right?" Jayme asked.

"You mean it worked?" Maglenna said, incredulous.

Jayme's dark eyes bore into her. "Haven't you done this before?" "Of course." On a simulator, but she didn't mention that. Jayme

didn't press the issue; he was suddenly fascinated by something on Morgan's left wrist.

"I got him!" shouted Haathi, who came running through the bulkhead door. She stopped cold on seeing the situation.

Jayme held up his hand. "It's okay, T'Charek. We got a pulse."

Maglenna held Morgan's head steady while the decompression tube retracted itself. Behind her, she could feel Haathi, watching, assessing, judging. A security trooper jostled her way into the repair bay, bearing medpacs and a repulsor sled.

"Need some help," Maglenna said loudly.

A thin, scrubbed young man emerged from the deep red shadows of the repair bay door. "I'm here. You can relax now."

"Oh," said Maglenna. She squinted. "You must be Nord."

"None other." He edged Maglenna out of the way and descended on Morgan, the trooper following his lead. In short order they ascertained that Morgan had fractured a collarbone and three ribs but not her spine, loaded her onto the sled, and quickly exited the ship. Haathi and Jayme seemed to want to follow, but instead they turned to Maglenna, who was leaning uncomfortably against the bulkhead. Haathi's black eyes studied Maglenna's face for a long time.

"I thought you were a clerk," Haathi said. Her voice was steady, but very quiet.

"Not by choice," said Maglenna evenly.

"Pendower is your name?"

"Call me Maglenna."

"Maglenna, would you please make sure Nord doesn't extract Morgan's heart and donate it to science?"

Maglenna blinked. Haathi's tone had not changed at all.

"What?"

"I just mean, go make sure he's doing his job right." There was no malice in Haathi's tone. Beyond the wry remark, there was just a professional cool.

"Certainly, Major," Maglenna said.

Haathi's eyes finally diverted their attention to Jayme, who was rummaging loudly through one of the lockers.

"What's with you?" she asked him.

"Going to find out who did this to Morg," he said.

"Nobody did anything," said Maglenna. "It was an accident. She probably stumbled into the power grid. Captain, you saw how obvious it was."

"No," Jayme said, pulling two heavy blasters out of the locker and dropping them into their respective holsters. "I didn't."



A Rolling Stone Gathers No Imperials

Unlike large Alliance bases and command centers, drop points are established with no hint of permanency in mind. OaS realizes that there is very little chance of an active drop point remaining undetected by Imperial spies, as these sites are located as close to the action as possible. Instead, each site is considered to be a one-shot deal, often remaining in operation for only a brief period before being abandoned. OaS will never return to a closed drop point, regardless of resources left behind.

Prior to mission departures, Special Ops teams are briefed on the time schedules and locations of potential drop points. While there is no set number of sites required to be established for each mission, most mission planners don't feel comfortable without providing at least three. Code phrases, passwords and contact procedures are also provided and disseminated on a need-to-know basis. Due to the increasing threat of discovery by Imperial forces, some drop points may never be activated or may be abandoned prematurely, forcing the Special Ops teams to search numerous systems for a useable site.

Locations and Security

Determining the location of the drop points themselves is often a greater undertaking than maintaining them. Using intelligence gathered from countless spies, operatives, and field agents, OaS must investigate hundreds of potential sites in each sector of operation. Warehouses, abandoned industrial centers and out-of-the-way docking bays are ideal locations for drop sites needed to transfer supplies or act as temporary havens for damaged ships.

Drop Point Gelgalar Duty Staff:

Colonel Arik Stijhl—Commanding Officer

Lady Maglenna Pendower—Administrative Aid/Field Medic

Lieutenant Bendlar Kovings—Communications Officer/Flight Deck Officer

Sergeant Lisa Mandrake—Security Team Leader, commands a 10-man security force

Sergeant Krugh Agovast—Cargo Master/Crew Chief, responsible for 16-man loader/maintenance crew, 8 B-1 labor droids, 4 maintenance droids, and 6 repulsor sleds

Sites used for the quick exchange of information may be nothing more than a vehicle garage or rooftop shelter.

Once the potential locations have been determined, arrangements for their use and security begin. Payoffs, deals and promises must be made to insure the sites will be safe from prying eyes and unwanted interruptions. It is at this juncture that the relationships developed by the Alliance are put to the test. Questions of trust and loyalty come into play, as all parties involved must balance risk of discovery against personal gain.

Site security is always a major concern, but providing it is not always an option. Resources are limited, so whenever possible drop points are established as unmanned equipment caches. Occasionally a droid or a hired contact may be nearby to give special instructions or last-minute briefings to the Special Ops teams. Physical security at these sites is minimal to non-existent, although materials left behind may be booby-trapped to self-destruct if tampered with.

Larger sites established as supply distribution centers or repair shops demand more stringent security measures. Armed guards, perimeter alarms and a network of lookouts and informants maintain a steady vigilance. Acting almost as micro-garrisons, some sites are crewed by several squads of security troopers equipped with heavy weapons and mobile gun emplacements for extra firepower.

Staff members, intelligence officers, smugglers and operatives gain admittance to these sites by following the security procedures laid down in previous briefings. Any ship or party not using a

recognizable call sign or password is subject to intense scrutiny and investigation. At the first sign of trouble or Imperial involvement the entire facility is placed on alert and the decision to evacuate is made by the commanding officer.



Morgan drifted through various levels of consciousness, but Maglenna couldn't make sense out of anything she was saying. They were in the medical supply cubicle; serious injuries were intended to be transferred to the nearest medical frigate, which meant that there were no bacta tanks for the odd disaster. So the only thing standing between Morgan and death was a quilted anti-shock blanket riddled with wires and sensors, a digital life-sign readout housed in one of the quilt squares near her heart, and dumb luck.

Maglenna sat next to Morgan's cot. Now that Nord had left, everything was almost oppressively quiet. It gave Maglenna too much time to think about everything that could have gone wrong. Would Jayme and Haathi blame her if Morgan died? Then again, hadn't they thanked her, in their own strange way?

The thought of Jayme brought something else to mind. Maglenna took hold of Morgan's bandaged left hand and examined the wrist. Sure enough, something was there—a thin, reddish welt, totally unrelated to the electrical shock.

Suddenly Morgan's fingers twitched, and her eyes opened. Pendower held Morgan's hand. "Morgan? Can you hear me?" "Whu—?"

"Everything's all right. You're at the Alliance drop point on Gelgelar—"

"I'm not the Maker," Morgan said thickly.

"What?"

Morgan repeated it several times, and then slipped back into an incoherent mumble. Maglenna stared blankly at the digital readout. Of course Morgan's system was saturated with drugs, and Maglenna gathered from Nord that Morgan didn't make much sense even when she was healthy. Nonetheless, Maglenna knew one context in which "the Maker" meant something other than the ship, and if this had anything to do with Morgan's current state, Maglenna didn't want to think about what Jayme was going to find.



Jayme stood underneath *The Maker*, staring at the landing pad, listening to the sounds of droids and workers bustling around the warehouse. The logical path of Morgan's assailant had taken him through the engine compartment escape hatch and down to the ground. There was an open floor grating two meters to his left.

Jayme got down on his belly and slid headfirst into the opening. Presumably this led to a maintenance tunnel. He bent in half at his torso, braced his legs on the landing pad, and dangled there for a second while his eyes adjusted to the darkness. Except the crawl space wasn't totally dark. There was a glow emanating from a distant pair of red lights. Jayme thought they were part of a control

Fenn's Warehouse

The warehouse on Gelgelar is owned and operated by Slerog Fenn, a crafty Rodian with a shady past. Erected decades ago from prefab kits, the building is large enough to accommodate a light freighter; but years of neglect have taken their toll. Several renovations have been attempted, but were never completed. The floors are cluttered with rusting storage tanks, stacks of useless cargo and piles of rotting building materials. The upper gantries are relatively operational, although open shafts and missing floorplates can be hazardous to the unwary.

Fenn obtained the structure as a payment on a gambling debt, and immediately saw the potential it offered as a challenge to the economic monopoly of his rival Loro Ecls. At the cost of a few hundred credits, the warehouse was made operational again and can accommodate most light freighters. Fenn envisions the warehouse as the keystone of his upcoming criminal syndicate and leases the building to smugglers and legitimate spacers for an astounding 200 credits a day in advance.

Fenn doesn't fully understand the current inhabitants, a rag-tag collection of security guards, droids and official-looking men. As long as they pay their 200 credits per day, Fenn is happy to leave them alone with whatever work they're doing in there.

panel until they disappeared around a corner. It occurred to him that he might jump down and follow the lights, but then he thought better of it. He stood up, jumped off the landing platform, and snatched a base schematic placard hanging from one of the control panels. For a moment he studied the placard; then he jogged across the landing bay in the direction the lights had been heading.

At that moment, every light in the warehouse went out.

Jayme stopped dead. A half-second later the backup lights kicked on, bright, cheap lumens that left parts of the warehouse starkly lit and other parts in deep shadow.

Oh, no, no, no.

He sprinted across the hangar, nearly tripping over his feet. *It wants to trap us in here with it. If it gets to the hangar door controls, we're all dead.*

Suddenly he was there, standing at the control panel, ripping open the yellow-striped maintenance cover and absorbing the control schematic on the inside. With the power out, the whole system would have to be prepped before the doors could be opened manually. Two large levers disengaged the hydraulic braking system, and made horrible ratchety noises as he pulled them down; and then there was a massive clang from the hangar doors as the braking pins popped out of their slots.

"Okay," Jayme said quietly to himself, wiping his sweaty hands on his pants, "manual override, manual override."

The layout was not well-mapped. Jayme wished Morgan were there. She could have had the doors open in two seconds and drawn a better control schematic on the back of a candy wrapper.

Thinking about Morgan cleared his head. He found the black switch that would depressurize the automatic hydraulics and engage the manual systems. Then, with much effort, he locked the unit's auxiliary power cylinders in place, and finally got his hands on the giant lever that would unlock the hangar doors.

He would have pulled it, too, except that his own shadow suddenly rose in front of him, and a tiny red spot appeared on the panel slightly to his left.

Before the spot could position itself at the back of his head, before there was the sound of blaster-fire, before the whole panel exploded, effectively locking everyone inside, Jayme was up a length of cable chain, halfway to the second level. Below him he heard the beeping of his assailant, a small, sleek assassin droid.

And he and his crew had brought it here.



A Welcome Addition

Drop points can become an exciting and vital addition to any Special Ops campaign, both as a plot device and to add an appropriate *Star Wars* feel to the game. They provide a logical way to connect several unrelated missions, strengthening the reality of the game and adding purpose. Here characters can receive orders, replenish supplies and hole up when things get too rough. Recurring gamemaster characters can meet players at a specific site to

supply them with new information or some special gadget to aid them in their mission. In addition, new player characters may be introduced at a drop point, easily allowing them to join an existing campaign.

In the movies the Rebels were forced to relocate their base of operations several times to escape Imperial forces. From Yavin to Hoth (and several implied locations in-between) and finally to a secret rendezvous spot at the far edge of the galaxy, we were treated to a variety of exotic planets and fantastic settings. By using a series of constantly-moving drop points instead of a permanent base, the gamemaster is given the leeway to create as many settings and exotic locales as are needed to dramatically move the adventure along. The excitement of travel, new locations and the constant fear of discovery go a long way toward expanding the cinematic feeling.

Further drama is added when the players realize that their base camp may not be there when they get back, and a sense that they must beat the clock slips into game sessions. And as most players know, sometimes the best laid plans can blow up in their faces—at a safe haven they can regroup and resupply, potentially salvaging the mission and their reputations.

Played properly, this can be the dramatic pause before the final confrontation. In *Star Wars* the Rebels had such an opportunity on Yavin before attacking the Death Star. They had another aboard the medical frigate at the end of *The Empire Strikes Back*. In fact, most adventure stories allow the lead characters a chance to regroup after facing a serious setback, to rethink their strategy and to strengthen their resolve. Remember that player characters are heroes too, and should be offered the same heroic options.



Haathi threw a datapad against the bulkhead, having spent the past twenty minutes trying to understand Morgan's notes on the power grid malfunction. Just as she considered jumping up and stomping on the pad, there was a tapping at the doorway.

"Major?" said Colonel Stijhl. "I thought you'd like some help."

"That's nice of you, sir, but do you know anything about circuit boards?"

"Not a thing. That's why I brought you a real engineer."

She squeezed in past the Colonel, a meek female Sullustan wearing

matted furs and carrying a tool box. Haathi got out of her way.

"This is Sergeant Nofre Ecls. She's one of our undercover operatives—she runs the Nofre Repair Bay," said Stijhl. "Don't tell her brother. He doesn't like Rebels much."

"Thank you, sir. I appreciate it."

"Don't get teary-eyed or anything. I have four other ships that are going to need this hangar today, you know."

"Speaking of which, is your hangar always this noisy? Sounds like you've got a riot going on outside."

"You wish. It sounds to me like a freight droid crashed into a pylon. Probably nothing."

"It's never nothing, sir."

"Not with you people around," said Stijhl, and he exited the ship.



Up the chain, through the second-level rail, on hands and knees, standing up now, running, leaping over a pile of boxes, running, running. Jayme remembered the obstacle course at the Imperial training base on Merikon, so difficult when he was a teenager. It hadn't occurred to him back then to be grateful that he wasn't being followed by a custom-made assassin droid. He could hear its repulsors whining behind him, pictured it hovering above the ground floor, slipping between the rails, gliding along behind him. The thought made his back prickle, and his heart felt as though it might explode.

Take it easy. Don't go crying about it yet.

He swung his blaster around and fired. The red bolt sputtered uselessly off the droid's shielding.

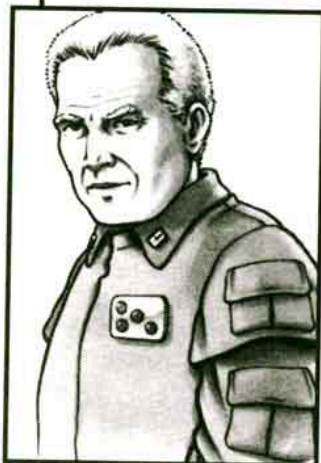
Okay, now you can cry.

At least the droid was slower than he was. Moreover, Jayme realized as he approached a stairwell, he had gotten a great running start. And running starts were perfect for one thing.

Jayme leaped over the stairwell edge and caught onto one of the metal steps above his head. An instant later, a yellow blaster-bolt hit the floor where his feet had been. By the time a second shot went off, Jayme was pulling himself up the back of the steps, hand over hand.

As soon as Jayme hoisted himself up to the railing, a barrage of shots went up the front of the steps in anticipation of his next move. But he didn't leap onto the steps. Instead, he dropped back down

Colonel Arik Stijhl



Type: Alliance Field Commander
DEXTERITY 2D+2

Blaster 3D, dodge 3D+2

KNOWLEDGE 4D

Alien species 5D, bureaucracy 6D, bureaucracy: Alliance supply 8D, business 7D, intimidation 5D+2, languages 5D, law enforcement 5D, planetary systems 5D, streetwise 6D, streetwise: black market 8D, value 7D

MECHANICAL 2D+1

Astrogation 4D, communications 5D+1

PERCEPTION 3D

Bargain 6D, command 6D, con 5D, gambling 5D, investigation 4D

STRENGTH 2D+1

Stamina 4D+1

TECHNICAL 3D+2

Computer programming/repair 4D+2, security 5D+2

Force Points: 2

Character Points: 12

Move: 10

Equipment: Comlink, datapad, 450 credits

Capsule: Stijhl served in the Old Republic Navy but never saw any action; his talent lay in getting people what they needed as cleanly and efficiently as possible. His reputation for delivering the goods under any circumstance was such that Alliance High Command sought him out for its Ordinance and Supply Inner Rim division.

Stijhl's underlings are aware he runs a tight ship, and they respect him for it. Perhaps this is why his most frustrating assignment was serving as quartermaster at the same training base as flight instructor T'Charek Haathi, whose various training "improvisations" often required the unauthorized use of critical supplies. The two of them were always at odds; Stijhl was a complete stickler for timetables, rules and organization. If things were not running exactly according to his plan, his intricate schedules would be thrown out of whack. Haathi infringed on his authority as king of the supply domain—an unspeakable act in the eyes of those who depended on him. As far as he was concerned, that meant everybody.

Stijhl enjoys his current duties of running drop points like the one on Gelgelar, since locating and stocking them has been a real challenge. He has proven that his contraband acquisition skills and business acumen are as sharp as they were in his younger days, and that he's still the pride of OaS...as long as Haathi isn't around.

to the second level floor, on the opposite side of the stairwell.

The droid stopped its barrage, confused. That bought Jayme enough time to simply run right up the steps. Jayme's head pounded. *What's upstairs? What can I use?*

The answer came in a sick flash. The rafters were upstairs, and once he got there he'd have nowhere to hide.



Alliance Drop Point Protocols

As Alliance operations progress in this and other sectors, the following policies and procedures for the use of drop points have been issued:

1. Purpose and Use: Drop points should serve primarily to restock equipment and personnel for Special Operations teams and deep cover operations. Secondary uses for such locations should include, when deemed appropriate, first aid, material repair, recruit pick-up, mission planning and supply procurement.

2. Drop Point Locations: Sites will be established throughout areas of ongoing Alliance operations as manpower and resources permit. Warehouses, docking bays and small isolated spaceports are prime locations, although deep space sites may be used as conditions dictate.

3. Duration of Activity: Unless specifically prearranged, drop points will be used only for a pre-determined period of time. The command staff will immediately cease operations or evacuate the site upon discovery or when the set time has elapsed.

4. Access: Mission planners will brief Alliance personnel as to the probable locations, duration and uses of specific drop points on a need-to-know basis. Comm frequencies, approach codes and passwords will be issued for specific sites, along with general distress and communication codes. Briefings should also include secondary procedures for establishing contact.

5. Crew Requirements: Guards, droids and personnel, when required, will be assigned to crew drop points as resources and situations dictate.

6. Priority Usage: All Special Operations teams shall be provided

with first priority use of any Alliance drop point and the resources contained there (excluding staff personnel and droids). Unless specifically designated for another operation or for the continued operation of the drop point, all supplies or equipment will be made available to these teams on a first-come-first-served basis.

7. Security: Every effort should be made to limit the access and use of Alliance drop points and to protect the identities of the personnel and droids assigned to them. Unauthorized use or deliberate disclosure to unauthorized entities is an offense punishable by court-martial, and could result in the loss of Alliance personnel and resources.



The Sullustan was working diligently at the power grid, with the main circuit board tucked under her arm. The grid was still smoking a little; it brought the smell of burned flesh to Haathi's attention.

She's alive. Don't think about it.

"What's the situation?" Haathi asked.

"The master circuit board is fried," Nofre told her.

"I know that. Tell me about the power grid."

"The, uh, the power grid is also fried."

Haathi had to stop a moment to keep herself from yelling. *It's not her fault.* "Could you please be more specific?"

"I need to rewire the whole thing."

"What?" Haathi shouted.

Nofre shrank back against the bulkhead.

Haathi cleared her throat. "I mean, uh, that appears to be a taller order than you're making it sound."

"No, ma'am, it'll just take a few days."

"I want my techie aboard a medical frigate by this time tomorrow."

"Sorry. Can't be done."

"Come on. There must be a way."

Nofre firmly shook her head.

"Couldn't we just hotwire the main engine to the power core?"

"You wouldn't want to do that."

"Why not?"

"You'd be flying without any safeguards."

"What does this mean, 'safeguards'?"

Nofre Ecls/Talana



Type: Sullustan Mechanic/Rebel Operative

DEXTERITY 3D

Blaster 4D+2, brawling parry 4D, dodge 4D

KNOWLEDGE 2D+2

Bureaucracy 4D, business: starships 6D+2, languages 4D+2, streetwise 3D+1, value: starships 6D

MECHANICAL 3D

Astrogation 4D, capital ship piloting 5D+2, capital ship shields 4D+1, sensors 4D, space transports 6D

PERCEPTION 3D+1

Bargain 7D+1, command 4D+2, forgery 5D, gambling 5D+2, persuasion 4D+2

STRENGTH 2D+1

Brawling 4D, climbing/jumping 4D+2, lifting 4D+1, stamina 4D

TECHNICAL 3D+2

Capital ship repair 5D, computer programming/repair 4D+2, droid programming 4D+2, droid repair 4D+2, first aid 5D,

repulsorlift repair 4D+2, security 6D+1, space transports repair 8D+2, starfighter repair 7D+1, starship weapons repair 6D+2

Special Abilities:

Enhanced Senses: Sullustans get +2D to *search* and related *Perception* checks in low-light conditions.

Location Sense: Cannot get lost in location if visited before. Receives +1D to *astrogation* rolls if traveling to a planet visited before.

Force Points: 1

Character Points: 6

Move: 10

Equipment: Blaster pistol (4D), comlink, datapad, protective goggles, tool kit

Capsule Update: Nofre Ecls is an undercover operative for the Alliance, a secret she keeps from everybody, especially her brother Loro. She realizes that the Empire may not jeopardize their lives directly at this time, but she sees the need to curb the power of such a ruthless government. She is very unhappy with the way her people and homeworld are controlled by the Empire and has secretly vowed to help the Rebellion whenever possible.

She helps repair Rebel ships on the sly, often absorbing the massive costs herself. She also acts as an infochant—the same information she collects for her brother is often valuable to the Alliance as well. Nofre operates under the code name Talana, and eventually checks out anyone tossing the name around. Someday she will inform her brother about this secret side of her life, but for now he has too many other things to worry about running Gelgelaar. (For complete information see *Platt's Starport Guide*, pages 68–70.)

**SPECIAL OPERATIONS ORDERS
#31894.98 A/891**



**OPERATION NIGHTHOOK
DROP POINTS**

CLASSIFICATION: TOP SECRET

MESSAGE AS FOLLOWS:

As a special operations team leader participating in OPERATION NIGHTHOOK, the following drop points have been established for your use:

Drop Point: Gelgelaar

Location: Gelgelaar Free Port

Services Available: Resupply/repair, minor first aid, orders, infochant

Primary Contact: Comm channel 3441.5—caution, open frequency; use your designated call sign when requesting landing instructions.

Secondary Contact: Operative code-named "Talana," Nofre Repair Bay

Challenge Phrase: "Do you have any references?"

Response Phrase: "We have a common friend on Bestine."

Planned Duration Available: 40 standard days from this order date

Drop Point: Laertos

Location: Laertos Spaceport

Services Available: Equipment cache only

Primary Contact: None (non-crewed), coded key-card Alpha 13 required

Directions: Proceed to docking bay #5662. On south wall, locate maintenance storage locker 13A1. Insert coded key-card designated as Alpha 13 in second key slot from bottom.

Contents: 4 blaster pistols, 2 hold-out blasters, 4 medpacs, 4 blank starport maintenance IDs, 4 starport maintenance coveralls, 2 vibroknives, 200 credits

Planned Duration Available: One use, will not be restocked

Drop Point: Condor

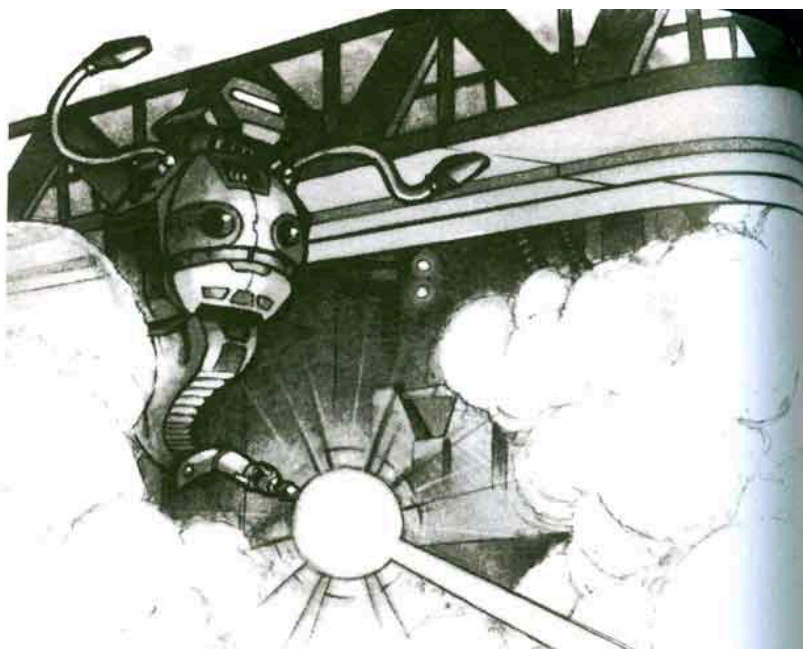
Location: System M132L4

Services Available: Orders, information exchange only

Primary Contact: Comm channel 2588.3, encryption code T33-A

Secondary Contact: Comm channel 7349.2, encryption code N21-H

Planned Duration of Operation: Comm channels will be monitored for 4 hours each standard day, from 0200–0600 Galactic Standard Time for the duration of this operation



"One power spike and the whole ship would blow." Haathi felt a mad rush of relief. "Is that all?" she yelled, incredulous. "Why didn't you tell me that before?"

Nofre's eyes widened. "Colonel Stijhl told me not to."

"Boy, you're boring. Tell you what. You hotwire the power core and I'll rewire the main c-board."

The Sullustan held the c-board tightly to her chest.

Haathi leaned in toward her. "Sergeant," she said, and added the three words she almost never used: "That's an order."



Colonel Stijhl had stepped out of *The Maker* into chaos. Kovings had run up to him with a breathless report about the hangar doors being locked shut, comm channels being jammed and several dead technicians in the forward maintenance pit. Around Stijhl, the warehouse's limited security force was firing blindly toward the ceiling lights, underneath which a shadowy object was chasing someone across the rafters.

STAR WARS

Adventure Journal • August 1997

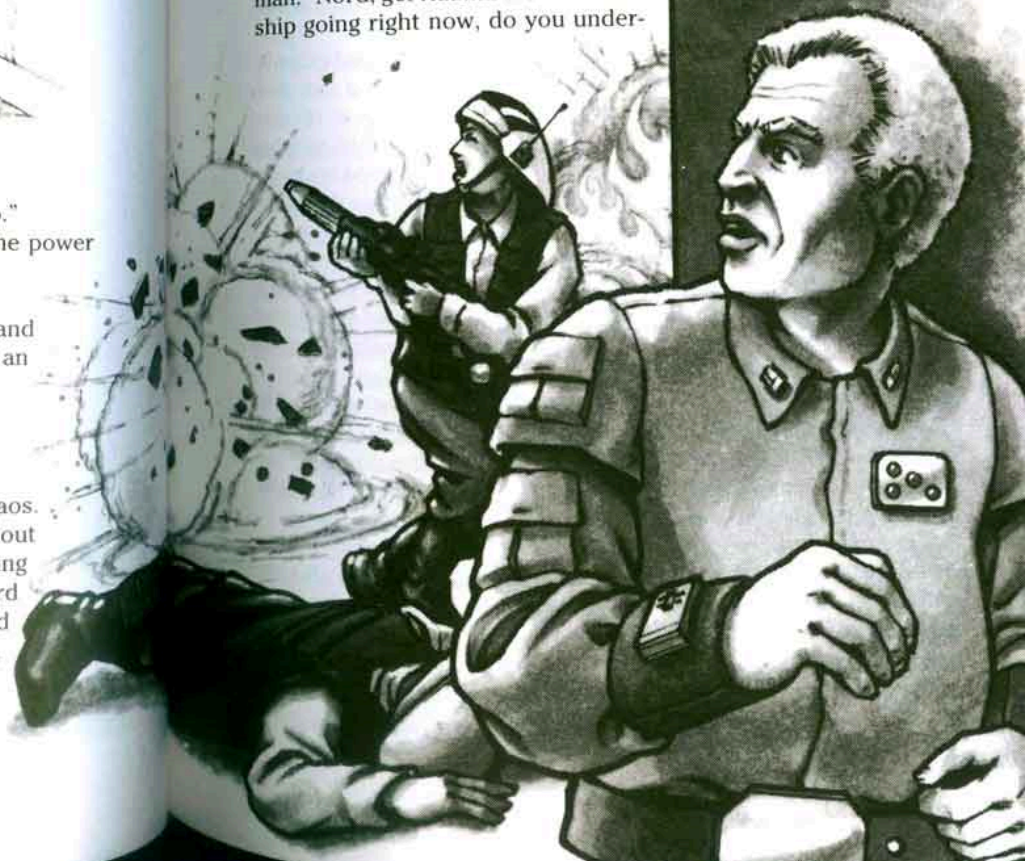
Then the explosions started. Massive stacks of crates on the west side of the hangar blew up and the ones with flammable contents caught fire. Tan-suited loaders came howling out into the open. From above there now came a salvo of blaster-fire, every single shot hitting home.

Stijhl, ducking behind a pylon, gaped as his people fell in quick succession. When the firing subsided, more crates began exploding, sending another flood of fresh targets into the open.

"Take cover!" the Colonel screamed. Some of them heard him and tried to find a safe place between the blazing supplies and the enemy's kill-zone.

"Sir!" somebody called as more blaster shots rained down. "Shouldn't we evacuate?"

Stijhl recognized Haathi's corpsman. "Nord, get Haathi! We need that ship going right now, do you under-



stand? Get everyone on board that ship!"

Nord might have heard him, but Stijhl wouldn't know, because at that moment he felt a burning across his back, and then nothing.



"Hey, loser!" Jayme called.

The droid stopped firing. Now that it was facing him, Jayme could finally get a good look at the thing: its snakelike body hovered over the girder, swaying gently back and forth as its flat head pivoted to face him. It looked very much like a metallic Sluissi. Except that it didn't have the sheen of normal metal; reflections seemed to melt off of it like random images washing across a monitor.

Jayme launched his own attack virtually point blank. Multiple shots from both blasters, a shrieking noise, a searing across his hands as the droid's shields sparked and collapsed. Then something black launched at him.

Jayme was at the end of the girder near the fourth-level catwalk. In a second he was over the catwalk guardrail, took a fast step toward the stairwell, and hoisted himself up, the balls of his feet balanced on the stair rails. Looking back, he saw what had erupted from the droid—a pair of whiplike tentacles. He dropped his guns, hurled himself into a backflip off the rails and landed on the beam directly behind the droid.

A second too late, the droid tore the rails apart with its tentacles. Before it could turn around and lash out at him, Jayme dove back over the rail and onto the catwalk, so close to the droid that it was startled. He scuttled away on hands and knees, then staggered to his feet.

Below him *The Maker* made occasional dead-start noises. He thought of Haathi and Morgan—warm, safe images. Suddenly his legs were jerked out from under him. He was falling, splintering noises in his ears and dust in his eyes, something cold wrapped painfully around his ankles. Then he stopped.

Jayme hung there for a moment, dizzy. Blood pumped into his head; everything was dark. He recalled seeing an open shaft covered by a length of plastiboard as he'd gotten to his feet—he must have fallen through. The droid wasn't strong enough to pull him out or smart enough to let him go. But he found himself wondering, as his limbs drained of sensation, just how strong the tentacles actually were.

He was answered by the sound of metal snapping and a falling sensation.

When he landed, Jayme shifted; shards of plastiboard slid off his back and a dull pain spread from his shoulder to his pinkie. He rose slowly, felt a yanking pain in his shoulder and the warm rush of blood draining from his head back into the rest of his system. Plastiboard had broken his fall at each level until he'd hit the ground floor. The droid was nowhere in sight.

He didn't see his blasters lying around on the floor, or buried in the splintered plastiboard. He decided the best thing was to keep moving. Clambering over a mountain of red metal crates, he got a good look at the carnage—the floor was covered with trashed repulsor sleds, charred B-1 loading droids, and human bodies giving off the overwhelming scent of blood iron and burned flesh. Techies and officers and loaders spilled out of dark corners of the warehouse, thumping across the floor and up the ship's entry ramp.

The Maker, however, still couldn't get itself started.

Jayme spied a clutter of tools down on the other side of the crates. He took a deep breath and clambered down into the unbearable heat and rummaged around until he found a pair of hull cutters.

"Captain!"

A female voice, ragged from coughing. He looked up, blinking in the hot, shimmering air. Maglenna Pendower was right in front of him, stooping over as she tried to manage the awkward load of an extinguisher in one hand and half-conscious Morgan hanging off her opposite shoulder.

"Maglenna! Are you all right? Have you got her?"

Maglenna replied by swinging the extinguisher at him. Jayme was so surprised that he didn't get the chance to move before she bashed his legs out from under him. He felt the agony across the leg that had taken the brunt, bile rising in his throat.

As he choked it down, an energy blast ricocheted off the floor.

Then he saw the sleek metal serpent hovering over the crates, shredded black cables dangling from it like intestines. From that angle the blast would surely have taken his head right off...had he been standing.

Jayme felt a massive surge of adrenaline. The droid swooped down at his face, but Jayme's hull cutters came right up to greet its underside. There was a ripping sound followed by a shower of

Doom Slayer

Model: Doom Slayer Assassin Droid

Type: Customized Assassin Droid

DEXTERITY 4D

Blaster 7D, missile weapons 6D

KNOWLEDGE 1D

Intimidation 5D

MECHANICAL 1D

Communications 5D

PERCEPTION 3D

Search 4D, sneak 4D

STRENGTH 2D

Brawling 4D

TECHNICAL 2D

Computer programming/repair 4D, security 4D

Equipped With:

- Three Locris Syndicates MGL-1 Micro-Grenade Launchers (range 5-25/100/200, blast radius 0-2/4/6, damage 4D/3D/2D, ammo 30 each)
- Modified BlastTech T-21 Light Repeating Blaster (range 3-75/120/300, damage 6D, ammo 300)
- Repulsorlift generator (altitude: 0-50 meters)
- Comlink jamming array (jams most comlink channels up to 300 meters, opposed *communications* roll needed to break jamming)
- Two retractable heavy grasping tentacles
- Several retractable fine task manipulator arms
- Scomp-link (utilizes both standard commercial and Imperial jacks)
- Body armor (+2D to *Strength* to resist damage)
- Ray shield generators (+2D to *Strength* to resist energy attacks)
- Self-destruct mechanism (blast radius 0-50/75/100, damage 12D/6D/3D)
- Electro-chemical camouflage paint (+2D to *sneak*)

Move: 8

Size: 1 meter sphere (non-extended), 2 meters maximum height (fully extended)

Cost: Not available for sale

Game Notes: The protection provided by the shield and the armor is cumulative, giving Doom Slayer 6D against energy attacks (*Strength* plus shield and armor), but only 4D versus physical attack (*Strength* and armor).

Capsule: Doom Slayer is the latest creation of the underground droid manufacturer Sythluss Leethe, a Sluissi craftsman and criminal genius. Based on a common Sluissi security droid, Doom Slayer has been heavily modified from the power core out. The unit resembles an abstract sculpture of an adult Sluissi more than it does a hunter-killer

sparks, and Jayme rolled out of the way before the thing could land on his head.

The droid screamed, its repulsor unit destroyed, its broken, stubby whip-ends lashing uselessly out at nothing as it fizzed and sparked violently on the floor. Jayme was up on his good knee now, the cutters still in his hands. He just started pummeling.

He didn't know what parts of the droid he was hitting, but he felt

machine. When on standby, it can fold itself into a compact sphere approximately one meter in diameter; while in full operation a "head" and "tail" structure extend, bringing the unit to a menacing two meters in height. When dodging, or just before launching an attack, the droid adopts serpentine movements, the head and tail swaying ominously.

The droid is constructed of a lightweight armor capable of providing protection against both physical and energy attacks, and by a series of micro-shield generators capable of providing additional protection from energy attacks only. The armor is also coated with a layer of micro circuits and a special chemical paint which is highly reactive to electronic currents. The Doom Slayer alters the electronic charges of the micro circuits, causing the paint to adopt a pattern and coloration similar to its current surroundings.

A compact, custom-designed power core provides the vast amount of energy required to keep the droid operational. Six shaped fuel cells are packed tightly around the core, with multiple fuel injectors wired directly to the droid's CPU. If for any reason the droid becomes non-functional (or upon pre-programmed instructions), the fuel injectors automatically open full, allowing an unregulated fuel flow into the core. Within three minutes the power reaches critical breakdown, and a devastating blast follows.

The standard single heavy blaster mounted on the security droids has been replaced with a custom modified light repeating blaster mounted on the folding "tail" section of the droid. Multiple blaster gas canisters, augmented by the recycled gas discharge of the power core, give the weapon an unparalleled 300 shots between charges. Three micro-grenade launchers mounted equidistantly apart in the main body supply the droid with the ability to cause mass destruction and to flush out live targets.

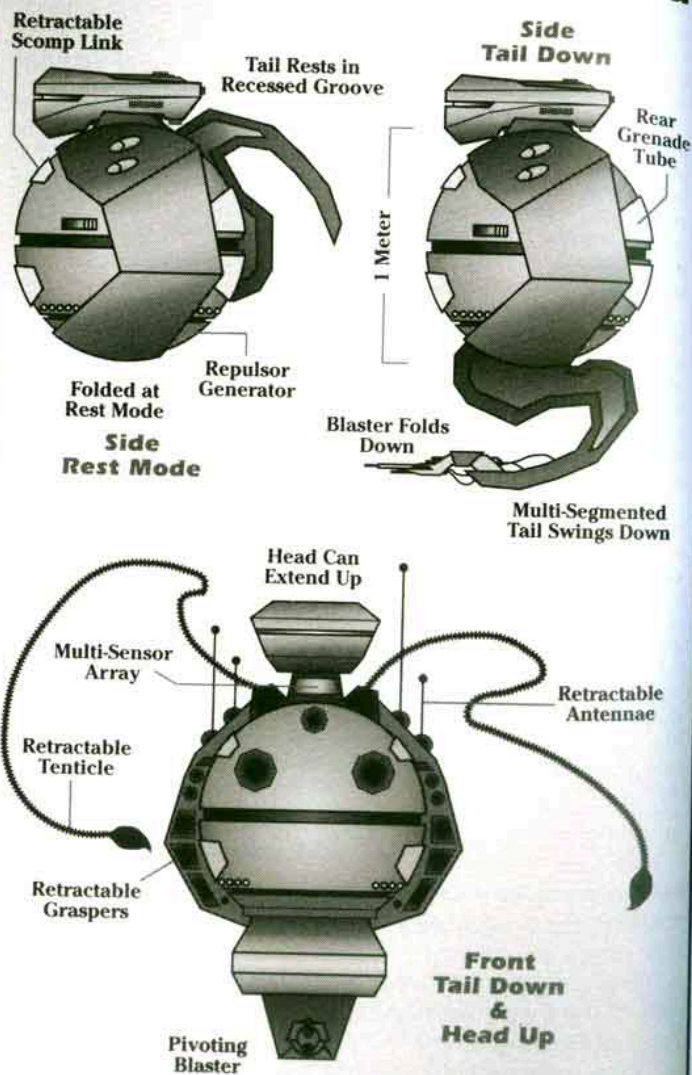
Due to the sheer expense of construction, Leethe only hires out Doom Slayer on hits that pay over 100,000 credits. To date the Doom Slayer has performed above expectations, successfully completing the assassination of five major smuggler lords in their own headquarters. Rumor has it that the Doom Slayer's next target was to have been a notorious Hutt. Needless to say, Sythluss might be in trouble if he has already accepted payment for the hit.

It denting under each blow, soft metal that nobody was supposed to get remotely close to.

"Yeah, you feel that? What's it like? Huh? You want some more? Take it! Drink it in, love it, yeah, it's pain, that's what you give and that's what you get!"

The droid stopped moving, but he kept hitting it, screaming at it, until he felt a hand on his shoulder.

Doom Slayer Assassin Droid



Major Haathi and Company

Looking for more information about this special ops team's previous misadventures? Check out "Special Ops: Shipjackers" in *The Official Star Wars Adventure Journal* #13. You'll find game statistics for Major T'Charek Haathi, Lt. Morgan Q. Raventhorn and Captain Dren Nord, plus information on *The Maker*.

"I think you killed it," said Maglenna.

Jayme looked down, panting. Its picturesque grace was gone; it didn't look like a Sluissi anymore, or even a droid. The swirling electromagnetic paint was half beaten off and looked tacky instead of mysterious. Jayme felt a throbbing in his shoulder, and with it a pang of disappointment; he had expected the droid to drag him to his last breath, to expire right after he heard its own final noises.

The sound of Morgan coughing brought him back to attention. He came up underneath her with his good arm, put his weight on Maglenna while helping her support Morgan at the same time. He leaned over and spit onto the killer's remains.

That was when he noticed the readout in the smashed torso unit.

01:35

01:34

01:33

"Oh, no," he said.



"Listen up," Haathi called over the sounds of moaning and chattering. "Somebody have a roster or something? Do we know who's here?"

"I think this is everybody, Major," one of the loaders said.

Almost everybody.

"Who has piloting experience?" she asked.

One of the green-suits did. Haathi sent him up the cockpit, told him to take off once the engines turned over. Then she picked her way past the sweaty, bleeding bodies crammed in the corridors and lying on the floors, and stood at the open entryway. At that moment she despised being a commanding officer.

The warehouse was clouded in a swirl of black smoke and flames



with strange chemical tints to them. The smell burned the back of Haathi's throat, made her eyes sting, but she didn't move.

Come on....

A massive figure came hobbling out of the smoke. No, two figures, one slung over the other's shoulder. Haathi came down the ramp a short way and helped Nord get the Colonel inside the ship.

"Morgan? Jayme?" she asked Nord.

"Didn't see them," he said.

The ship listed as its repulsorlifts came to life. Haathi remained steady.

Then they emerged, covered in soot and blood—three people trying desperately to help each other run but only managing a

collective, crippled lope. Haathi stumbled to the end of the ramp, choking back toxic fumes and tears, pulled Morgan off of Jayme and Maglenna and carried her back up. Somebody in a tan uniform met her halfway and took Morgan inside.

The Maker lifted a meter off the floor. Haathi fell onto the closing ramp. She grabbed a support strut and heard the scuffling noises of Maglenna and Jayme. When she steadied herself she saw Jayme lying at the end of the ramp, breathing hard. One of his legs was soaked in blood; his face wasn't registering pain, but his body was nearly curled into the fetal position and he looked as though he didn't have another movement left in him.

Nonetheless he got himself turned around and thrust out his hand to Maglenna, who was still on the ground. Haathi threw herself down to the edge and grabbed Maglenna's other hand.

The ramp closed. The three of them were inside, coughing, their clothes wet and reeking of chemical smoke. *The Maker* smashed into the hanger doors with such a horrible sound of wrenching metal that Haathi's vision darkened, and she thought she saw the walls of her ship buckle and twist. Before she could focus, *The Maker* rocked violently as the assassin droid blew itself and the warehouse into white-hot oblivion.



When Stijhl finally felt like dealing with Haathi's team, he had them gather around a table in one of the medical frigate's large white utility rooms.

He spoke in measured tones. "Major, I'd really love to hear your explanation for why we lost an entire warehouse full of equipment."

"A case of mistaken identity," said Haathi calmly.

"What?"

"Tell him, Morg."

Raventhorn sat up straight and put her hands on the table, as if she were about to outline a major battle strategy. "Well, sir, first you got to picture something. Are you picturing?"

"Get on with it."

"Picture us all on Zelos II, stealing *The Maker*."

"Wait," said Haathi. "What am I wearing?"

"Major—" said Stijhl.

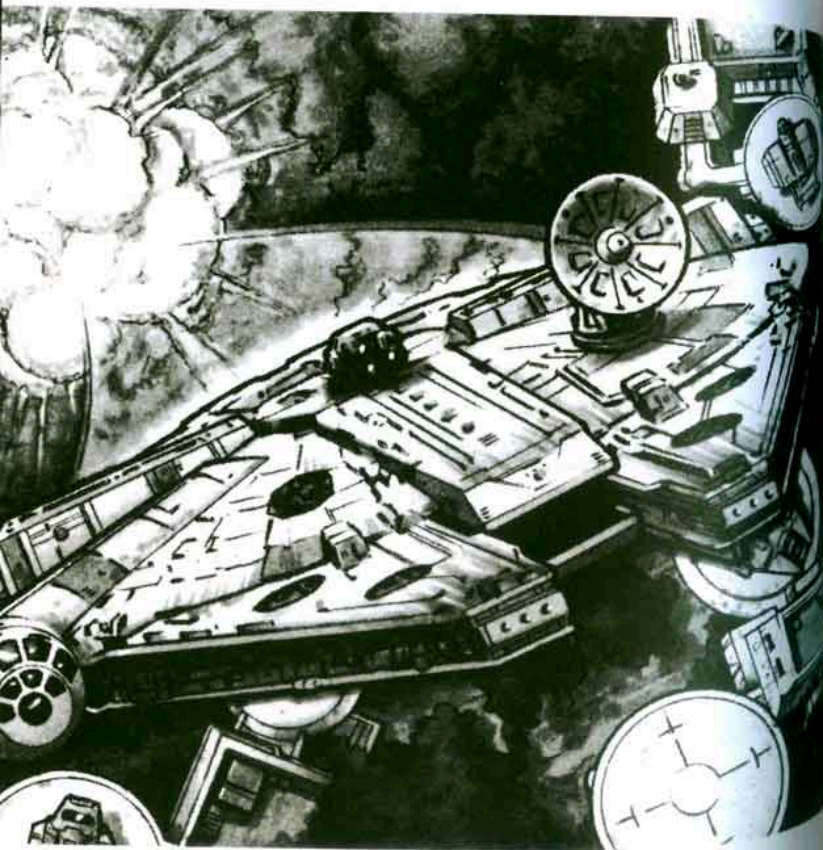
Morgan said, "We've got a limited time, so the only thing we really check out is the background of the ship and who it belongs

to—Sythluss Leethe. We don't actually look up Leethe's background. So I did some checking here, and you know what he does for a living?"

"I'm afraid to—"

"That's right—he's a droid manufacturer! Serving the underworld with quality merchandise for over twenty years. So when we take off with his ship, we're also taking off with his latest project, designed to off some bounty hunter or a Hutt or somebody gross like that.

"Anyway, the droid must have been on a timer and activated itself shortly before we landed. Its basic purpose was most likely to



wipe out a secure area and terminate the life-signs of those it came into contact with—like me—as well as anyone who tried to interfere with its agenda—like Jayme. When your people opened fire on it, I guess it declared open season on everything that moved. And in the end, even though Jayme beat it, it succeeded in its mission parameters anyway."

Haathi spoke. "All in all, we're pretty lucky."

Stijhl pretended to clean out his ear. "What? What was that word? Maybe you should listen to the damage assessment." He leaned out the door. "Pendower, get in here!"

Maglenna entered and handed him a datapad.

Stijhl began reading. "Six industrial grade power generators, 600 field medpacs, 82 perimeter sensors, eight B-1 worker droids, 200 blaster packs...shall I go on?"

"One warehouse," added Haathi.

"Just keep it up, Haathi, it won't save you from what's coming next."

"Which is what?"

"You're going on an acquisition run for me."

"What for?"

"Six industrial grade power generators, 600 field medpacs, 82 perimeter sensors, eight B-1 worker droids, 200 blaster packs...shall I go on?"

Haathi studied the colonel. "I'll need some supplies."

"Like what?"

"One medic."

"You have a medic."

"Not really."

"Hey!" said Nord.

"Come on, Nord, you like the Colonel, don't you?" She turned to Stijhl. "He saved your life, didn't he? Even purged your office data files for you after you went down?"

"What are you getting at?"

"You get Nord and we get Maglenna."

Stijhl looked at Nord, who shrugged. "Anything would be an improvement, sir."

"Pendower?" said Stijhl. "Is this what you want?"

"Yes, sir," said Pendower. "I discussed it with Haathi's team."

"She's qualified," Jayme said. "Obviously."

Stijhl gave a heavy sigh. The red tape was going to be murder, getting her transferred into Special Ops. Somehow that was noth-

Lady Maglenna Pendower



Type: Former Senatorial Aid
DEXTERITY 2D+2
 Blaster 5D, dodge 3D+2, running 3D+2
KNOWLEDGE 4D
 Alien species 4D+2, bureaucracy 5D+2, bu-
 reaucracy: Alliance Command 7D, bureau-
 cracy: Imperial Senate 6D+2, culture 5D, lan-
 guages 7D, value 5D, willpower 4D+2
MECHANICAL 2D
 Communications 3D+2, repulsorlift operation
 4D, sensors 2D+2
PERCEPTION 3D
 Bargain 6D, command 5D, con 4D, forgery
 4D+1, persuasion 4D+2, search 3D+2
STRENGTH 3D+1
 Stamina 4D+1, swimming 3D+2
TECHNICAL 3D
 Computer programming/repair 5D+2, first aid
 5D, (A) medicine 1D, security 4D
This character is Force-sensitive.
Force Points: 2
Character Points: 12

Move: 10

Equipment: Datapad, comlink, 1,200 credits

Capsule: As a member of Leia Organa's senatorial staff, Lady Maglenna Pendower was once witness to the inner workings of the corruption that was the Imperial Senate. Her status as an aide allowed her to interact with the underlings of the other senatorial staffs, often

ing in the face of sitting in the room with Haathi for another moment.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"No, sir," said Pendower. "We'll also be needing those medpacs Major Haathi requested earlier."

"Take one. Take fifty. Go. Leave. Dismissed."

Haathi took the Colonel's hand and shook it. "A pleasure as

providing the Princess with vital information regarding the true activities of the Senate and the Emperor.

On several occasions she worked with the Princess planning Alliance activities, but when it came time to carry out a dangerous mission, Maglenna was always left behind. Someone had to cover everyone's tracks: to make excuses to the Senate, to feed false information to the newsnets, and to deal with the unexpected. Maglenna longed to get her hands dirty, but she was too valuable as a front to risk sending into the field.

A native of Alderaan, she lost her father and one of two brothers when the planet was destroyed. It was never confirmed whether the younger brother was off-planet at the time; attempts to locate him have so far been in vain. Maglenna's longing for action has since transformed into a deep need to never be helpless in a life-or-death situation again. Using her administrative abilities she finally managed to get herself enlisted in Alliance combat medical training program, with hopes of receiving a field assignment.

Although Maglenna graduated at the top of her class, Princess Leia was not amused—Maglenna, she said, was much more valuable to the Alliance as an agent. With that the Princess transferred Maglenna to Ordnance and Supply to assist with the revamping of the drop point program. Maglenna rightly believes that Leia is being overprotective and has requested a transfer several times since; however the Princess just has too much clout. Still, Maglenna looks forward to the day when she can leap straight into the face of danger. (For more information on Lady Maglenna Pendower, see the *Shadows of the Empire Sourcebook*, page 72.)

always, sir," she said, and then turned to her crew. "Let's be off, boys and girls."

They strolled out, Nord trailing behind them. Stijhl put his head on the desk and stared at the floor.

Someone came into the room. "Sir?"

"What is it, Kovings?" asked Stijhl without lifting his head.

"It's not too late to shoot them."

In Memoriam: Clifford Wilson III

Black Hawk Hobby Distributors President Clifford Wilson III died Tuesday, February 18, of a heart attack while driving. He was 38. Wilson is survived by his wife, Sheila, and two children, Lindsey, 12, and Clifford Keith Wilson IV, 8.

After graduating from college, Wilson bought into Black Hawk Hobby Distributors with partners. He eventually bought out his partners, becoming the sole owner, and later incorporated the company. Under his tenure, Black Hawk operated strictly as a wholesale organization, with no retail operations. Black Hawk has been distributing West End Games' roleplaying lines for over a decade, and is one of several distributors steadily supplying the hobby trade with *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* books and other products. Wilson was also the majority stockholder of Minifigs, a manufacturer of historical miniatures.

"Cliff set up all his companies as separate entities to provide for any occurrence," said Dan Matheson, Black Hawk's warehouse manager. "By all accounts, he did a good job."

For the interim, day-to-day operations at Black Hawk are continuing under Matheson and Black Hawk's other employees. "Business is continuing without interruptions, thanks to the way Cliff set things up," Matheson said. "I heard the inkling of a rumor that we were gone. No, we're not. We're here and working. It was an unfortunate tragedy involving a corporate partner, but Black Hawk is still shipping."

Funeral services were held Saturday, February 22, at Gloria Dei Church in Rockford, Illinois.

A savings account has been set up to benefit Wilson's children. Contributions should be made payable to Lindsey and Clifford Wilson IV Fund and sent to Macktown State Bank, Attn: Bonnie Gundry, P.O. Box 409, Rockton, IL, 61072.

Join Dr. Corellia Antilles for a lecture delivered to assorted department heads and interested parties at the Galactic Museum shortly after the re-establishment of the New Republic on Coruscant. Dr. Antilles is a leading expert on artifact recovery and a chief consultant on the New Republic's efforts to recover dangerous artifacts.

From the Files of Corellia Antilles

By Timothy O'Brien

Illustrations by Matt Busch

The history of the peoples, cultures and civilizations of the galaxy is almost unimaginably long. Thousands of civilizations rose and fell before the development of hyperspace travel, with little contact with even their closest neighbors. Since then thousands more have come into the awareness of the galactic community. The sum recorded history of the galaxy is estimated to total about

500,000 years, and that's just the history we can decipher. Perhaps another 500,000 years or more of history lies unknown, undeciphered, or simply unrecorded. Some cultures left only ruins behind, others left artifacts and craft items, and yet others left only legends. History studies written records. Xenoanthropologists and xenoarchaeologists study the unwritten physical record left behind by unknown peoples.

Of course, many objects left behind tend to become valuable to scholars, museums and private collectors. That's where I come in. My name is Dr. Corellia Antilles, and I am a xenoarchaeologist specializing in artifact retrieval. I've been asked to go over the state of museum recovery efforts in the wake of plundering by certain Imperial officials. I am not here to discuss archaeology or site practices, but a brief overview is called for.

Archaeology is a slow and delicate art, requiring patience, gentleness, imagination, and insight. Excavating a site may take years, decades, or even centuries. The recovery of a physical record, usually buried under years of soil accrual, is performed more with brushes and hand spades than power tools and heavy machinery. Sensor scans and computer modeling speed this process by a factor of ten, but the actual excavation is still a tedious and lengthy physical process. This is a necessary evil, since many of the most important and interesting items are fragile due to age and require careful handling. Some of the most revealing objects recovered are small and difficult to detect—they require attentive sifting to recover.

Although this careful recovery process is the ideal, it is often ignored by potters—site raiders who steal the most obviously valuable objects to sell on the black market. In recent years, this problem has been compounded by Imperial officials seeking to expand their art collections, usually founded with pieces plundered from museums and native peoples. Local governors, Moff's, Grand Moff's, high-ranking military and COMPNOR officers, and Imperial Advisors rampaged through the most promising sites in the galaxy to sate their hunger for antiquities. By far the worst of these was the Emperor himself, who ordered dozens of digs apparently in an ongoing search for rare and powerful Jedi artifacts.

These Imperial digs were very successful in their own terms—hundreds of sites were excavated, and the choicest artifacts ripped from their resting places. The very best of these went into private

Doctor Corellia Antilles



Type: Adventurous Xenoarcheologist

DEXTERITY 3D

Blaster 6D, brawling parry 4D+2, dodge 5D, melee combat 4D, melee parry 4D+1

KNOWLEDGE 4D

Alien species 6D, bureaucracy 5D, cultures 6D+2, intimidation 5D, languages 6D+2, law enforcement 4D+2, planetary systems 5D+1, scholar 6D+1, scholar: sapientology 8D, scholar: archaeology 8D, streetwise 6D+2, survival 6D+1, willpower 6D

MECHANICAL 3D

Astrogation 4D, communications 4D, repulsorlift operation 5D, sensors 5D, space transports 3D+1, starship gunnery 3D+1

PERCEPTION 3D

Bargain 5D, command 3D+2, con 6D, hide 5D+1, investigation 7D, persuasion 5D, search 5D+2, sneak 5D

STRENGTH 3D

Brawling 5D, climbing/jumping 5D, stamina

4D+2, swimming 4D+1

TECHNICAL 2D

Computer programming/repair 3D, demolition 3D+2, first aid 4D+2, security 5D

Force Points: 3

Character Points: 20

Move: 10

Equipment: Datapad, reference datacards, medpac, Merr-Sonn Model 434 blaster pistol (5D+1), 10 meters synthrope

Capsule: Educated in several of the finest university programs in the galaxy, Dr. Antilles is a fine xenoarchaeologist with thousands of hours on digs from the Core Worlds to the Outer Rim. She has a tendency to get involved with hazardous artifact recoveries, and her adventures have advanced her career considerably.

collections, and the remainder were displayed in public museums throughout the Empire. Unfortunately, in their haste to produce flashy trophies for their masters, the diggers often trampled crucial evidence and carelessly destroyed less interesting-looking items. These objects were poorly recorded and often misinterpreted. There's a tendency to assume everything dug up is of great cultural, usually religious, value, with only scanty evidence. There are several famous cases of this sort of thing—my favorite being the excavation of the "Voorlach Temple" on Krykis IV, the artifacts of

which toured three sectors. The "temple" turned out to be an indoor marketplace, and the "religious relics" were revealed as common market goods.

The threat of items of unknown technology and function is more dangerous. The Emperor was well-known as an acquirer of mystic objects. He was certainly not the only such collector. Many of his adepts and advisors remain unaccounted for, and may have access to Jedi objects, Sith relics, Gree artifacts, Tundan implements, or other powerful rarities. All represent an unknown danger to the New Republic. Dozens, perhaps hundreds of such devices now float through the legal and illegal markets, and are actively sought after by the New Republic, her enemies, and powerful collectors.

Such threats have already appeared in the forms of Dark Adept Glynis Tor's exploitation of his master's hoard, the Tundan sorcerer Rokur Gepta's quest to co-opt ancient species' power, and the attempt by Lord Vader to acquire the Kaiburr Crystal. Historically, the infamous Krath are thought to have begun their reign of terror with the aid of Sith relics. This trend can only be expected to continue.

Additionally, Imperial ravaging and lax enforcement of the archaeological codes have allowed culturally important artifacts to be squirreled away as art treasures and curios by greedy collectors. Return of such items can carry a great deal of weight in diplomatic circles.

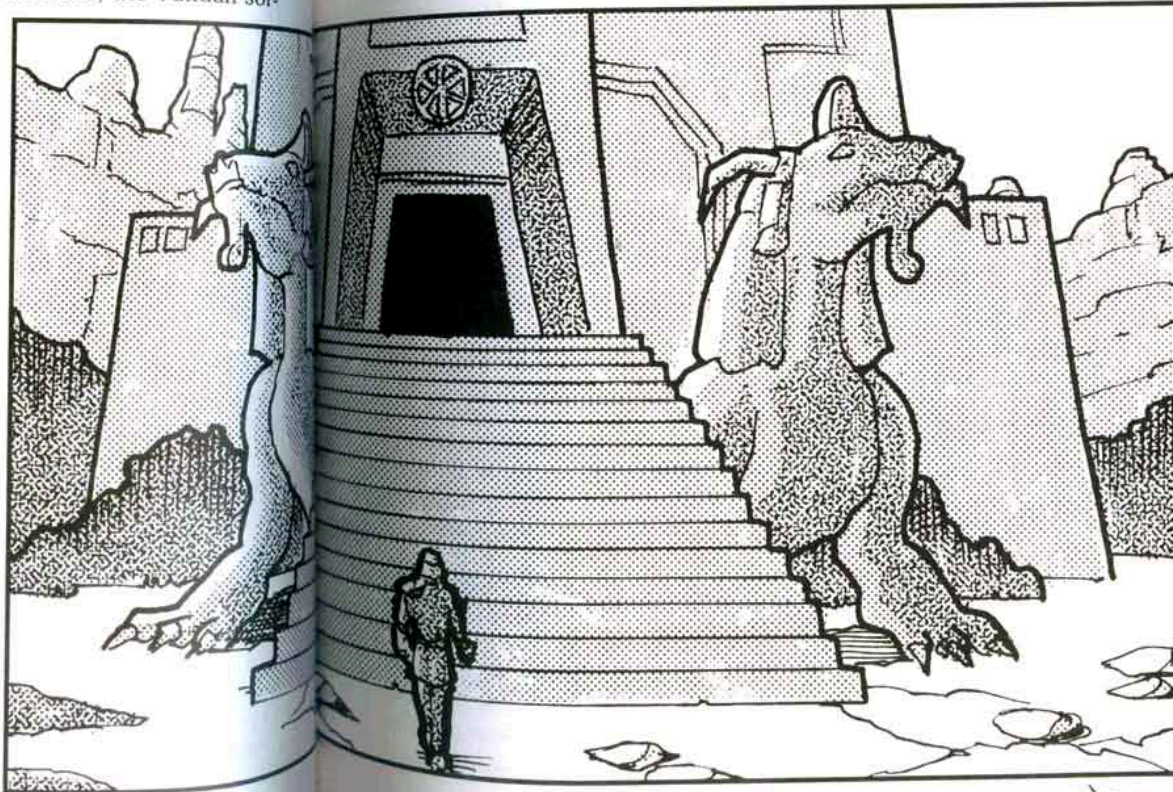
Lastly, there is the problem of general looting during the recent civil war on Coruscant. During the fighting, some thieves took advantage of the chaos to break into local repositories and museums, stealing what they could. The Imperial Museum on Coruscant was not immune. Although many of the exhibits and display houses were safe behind battery-powered security systems, many of them were not. Thou-

sands of museum pieces were stolen by scavengers during the Empire's brief resurgence, when Coruscant was without central authority. Hundreds have been recovered, but many hundreds more are unaccounted for.

The New Republic is always seeking more information about stolen treasures and pillaged digs. Here are several of the most important archaeological locations and relics we are currently concerned about.

The Sith Tombs on Korriban

Long ago, the Lords of the Sith Empire were the undisputed masters of the worlds in their grip. We know very little about their civilization, which fell about 5,000 years ago.



On the planet Korriban, a grim desert world, traces of the Sith Empire can be seen in monumental tomb complexes. Korriban is avoided by nearly all space travellers, even with the Imperial ban on such travel gone. It's remote, uninhabited, and eerie. The few visitors to the world describe whistling winds rising from the plains and howling sandstorms that cut through the wind-carved valleys and shred living beings in seconds. Savage predators wander the wastes, hunting the stringy rodents and scrub-grazing herbivores that scratch out a living here. Winters are bitter and summers blistering. It is a world of little moderation.

The funereal valley of the Sith Tombs is shadowy and nearly lifeless. Particularly vicious predators prowl the area, although there is no water near the place and their prey avoids the area. The tombs jut out of the valley's walls, some carved from solid rock, others constructed from huge blocks. At the center of the canyon is a large building, apparently a temple. These monuments are watched over by gigantic glowering statues of armored, horn-helmeted sentinels and fantastic predators. Legend claims that guardian spirits and droids attack tomb-robbers. The truth of this is not known, but very few Sith funerary objects are known to have appeared on the black market.

Ancient, decayed, and incomplete Sith records claim the tombs are full of funeral treasures, ornamental furnishings, and the corpses of sacrificial victims. The Lords of the Sith believed in taking their wealth with them, and a large portion of their accumulated riches were sealed behind tons of rock, including their personal ships and favorite slaves. This should be an archaeologist's playground.

During the Old Republic there were a few expeditions to the ancient Sith worlds, but they were small and closely supervised by Jedi. With the rise of the Empire, the Sith worlds were sealed and closely guarded. Only the Emperor's hand-picked adepts were allowed to enter Sith space, and data on the worlds was systematically deleted from the record-banks of the Empire.

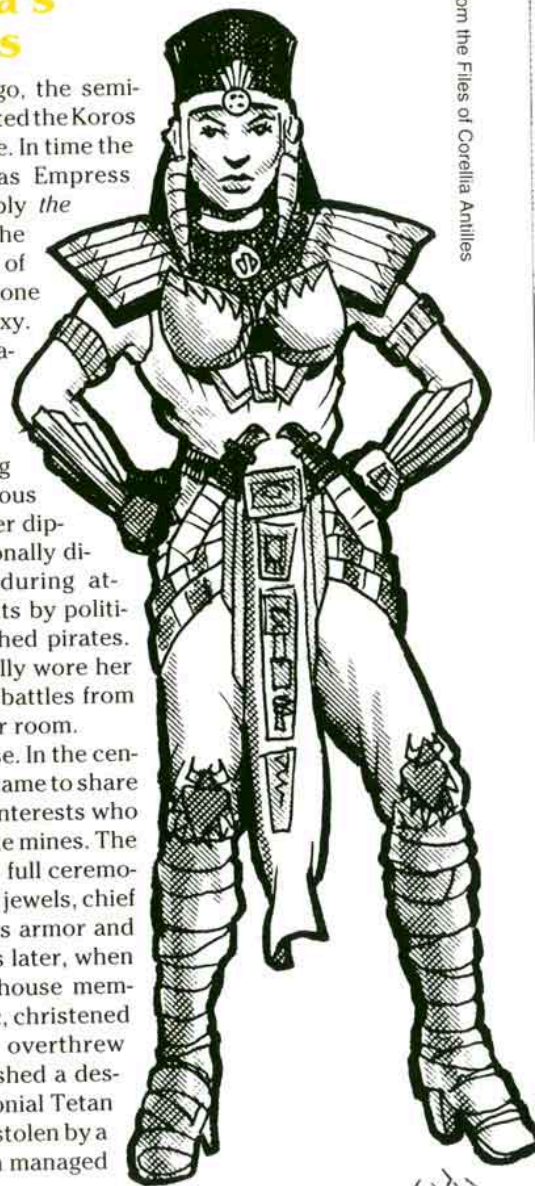
Today we stand threatened by our own ignorance. Many of the Emperor's adepts have evaded capture. Some of these may have escaped to an old Sith world to study in a lost fortress or library. We simply don't know enough about these mysterious planets. An expedition to the Korriban Tombs is an obvious starting place.

(For more information on the Sith Tombs of Korriban, see the *Golden Age of the Sith* series from Dark Horse Comics.)

Empress Teta's Crown Jewels

Five thousand years ago, the semi-mythical Empress Teta united the Koros system under her wise rule. In time the system became known as Empress Teta's system, then simply the Empress Teta system. The Tetan crown jewels, part of her personal artifacts, are one of the wonders of the galaxy. Teta's original royal treasures included her crown, ornaments, personal battle armor, and a matched pair of fighting knives. Teta was as famous for her martial skills as her diplomatic ability, and personally directed several battles during attempted coups and revolts by political enemies and entrenched pirates. While at war she habitually wore her armor when supervising battles from her throne room-cum-war room.

Her heirs were less wise. In the centuries after her rule they came to share power with commercial interests who ran the system's carbonite mines. The royal family still retained full ceremonial duties and the crown jewels, chief among which were Teta's armor and knives. A thousand years later, when two of the Tetan royal house members turned to Sith magic, christened themselves the Krath, overthrew their elders, and established a despotic regime, the ceremonial Tetan Crown Jewels vanished, stolen by a Tetan loyalist. The Krath managed



From the Files of Corellia Antilles

to reclaim select items, but most of the jewels stayed hidden away in secret caches all over the system. Even after the death of the Krath, the treasures remained hidden. Over the next four thousand years most of these caches were discovered and the Crown Jewels slowly restored. Today, only a few items remain missing, most notably Teta's Knives, the matched blades the Empress used as her personal hand weapons. They may be in the Empress Teta system, or perhaps have already been discovered and deposited in a private collection. A standing reward of one million credits is offered by the Tetan Royal Family for any of the Tetan Jewels.

(Empress Teta's crown jewels appear in the *Golden Age of the Sith* series from Dark Horse Comics.)

Ossus

The mysterious world of Ossus was once a planet of learning and peace—an important Jedi center. About 4,000 years ago it was abandoned due to the sudden supernova of the nearby Cron Cluster during the Sith War. (Legend claims that the Krath somehow detonated the stars, but no serious scholar believes that.) Ossus was almost completely devastated—all of the animal life and nearly all the plant life was killed. The creatures now on the planet are alien to the world and arrived in the intervening four millennia.

Ossus was never re-colonized. It slipped into obscurity behind the veil of the Cron Drift, the nebula-remains of the novas that laid waste to the planet. The only modern inhabitants are the descendants of crashed or marooned crews and a few squatters. The planet today is a wasteland of shadows, mists and ruins inhabited by bands of semi-barbarians. Vital clues about the Jedi may remain preserved under the accumulated debris and ashes of 40 centuries. It was on Ossus that Luke Skywalker discovered a trove of ancient lightsabers, and recovered old Jedi texts to aid him in his quest against the returned Emperor. It is nearly certain that more awaits recovery.

Ossus has many dangers: traversing the Cron Drift is hazardous due to ion storms and rogue asteroids, the local Ossun tribes may or may not be friendly, ruins are naturally unstable, the planet is reported to be plagued by violent electrical storms, and it's impossible to say how many Force-aware beings have wandered to this world in an effort to uncover old secrets.

(Ossus appears in the *Tales of the Jedi* and *Dark Empire II* series from Dark Horse Comics.)

The Dark World of Ossus

A number of Jedi, archaeologist, or Jedi archaeologist adventures could be set on Ossus. The characters must work their way to the remote section of space that holds Ossus, navigate the treacherous Cron Drift, make contact with the natives (some of whom aren't friendly), and explore the ruins. Excavating Ossus would probably take a thousand years, so there's no hurry. The characters settle in and start to investigate the planet's past.

Not all dark Jedi or evil Force magicians were servants of the Emperor. Some were as hunted as the Jedi Knights. One of these, Travgen, escaped Palpatine's purge and eventually wound up on Ossus. He sensed Luke Skywalker's arrival and departure, but didn't go hunting for the prodigy and was relieved when Skywalker left.

Travgen decides that the characters' expedition is a serious threat after they settle in. The dark Jedi isn't nearly as powerful as Palpatine was, although almost as twisted. After twenty years of practice, meditation, and oppression of the local tribes, he is about as powerful as Luke (as of *Dark Empire*). He isn't nearly as brave, though, and begins by sending one of his enslaved tribes to try to scare the characters off. When this fails, he attempts to overawe them, and quickly departs the scene if they stand up to him. Only if pursued to his lair—an old ruined administrative center—does he stand and fight. In his lair he has a home-ground advantage and has rigged the place with nasty surprises to hold off an attacking tribe.

Uueg Tching's Sayings

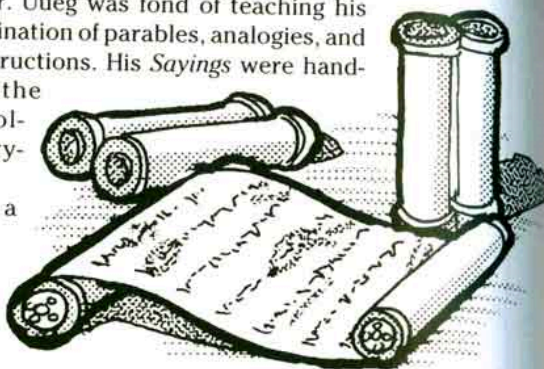
The original manuscript of Uueg Tching's *Sayings* was kept for the last 3,000 years in the Rare Books Department of the Atrisian Imperial Historical Library on Kitel Phard. Uueg, the 54th Atrisian Emperor, was famous for his successful tyrannical rule, which he attributed to his insight in diplomacy, grand strategy, and effective use of spies. Uueg increased the Atrisian Empire to rule, directly or indirectly, the whole of Kitel Phard. An enlightened despot, he is remembered by Atrisians for his skill in diplomacy, in war, and in

maintaining order. Uueg was fond of teaching his heirs with a combination of parables, analogies, and cold-blooded instructions. His *Sayings* were hand-recorded by the scribes who followed him everywhere.

The *Sayings* are a classic instructional text on political manipulation, grand strategy, internal rule, and conquest. They were intended to be a guide to his descendants, but few of the following Atrisian Emperors of the Tching Dynasty bothered to learn from his sayings (among the few who did are the famous Invisible Empress, Oeana Tching, and Eoaq the Expansive). This single manuscript signalled a great change in Atrisian politics, swinging away from the great bloody wars of the past (assault units and tactics are still modeled after the precedents of the Third Atrisian period) and toward subtle policies of infiltration, espionage, and assassination. About 1,500 years ago, the *Sayings* were printed in a small run for the Atrisian nobility to marvel over (a ploy by the Atrisian Emperor to display the superiority of his noted ancestor, and by extension himself). The *Sayings* were made available 550 years ago in a general database and in specially printed reproduction to raise cash and demonstrate the power the Atrisian Parliament had wrested from the throne.

Twelve years ago Emperor Palpatine "requested" the original manuscript for the Imperial Museum on Coruscant for its great historical value to the galaxy. It arrived with a small amount of fanfare, was briefly displayed, and soon vanished into the Emperor's private holdings. The Emperor had already displayed mastery of Uueg's ways, and it is likely he simply wanted the scrolls as a trophy.

During the New Republic's drive on Coruscant, most of the Emperor's prizes were spirited away in several shipments to, we believe, private strongholds. The *Sayings* are thought to be among them. At least one of these shipments crashed, and a few of the artifacts on board survived. What happened to the *Sayings* is not



known, although they were not on the manifest for the crashed shuttle. At least two other shuttles are unaccounted for (three were recovered, two vanished into the Deep Core, and another shipment is in an Imperial faction's control).

The original manuscript is hand-written in black ink on several long scrolls, in Atrisian script. Additions, clarifications, and notes were made in red ink. These red ink comments are thought to be Uueg's personal remarks, made in his own hand. They were at last report protected in an ornate durrellium scrollcase.

Recovery of the *Sayings* manuscript would be a great help in improving relations with the Atrisian Commonwealth.

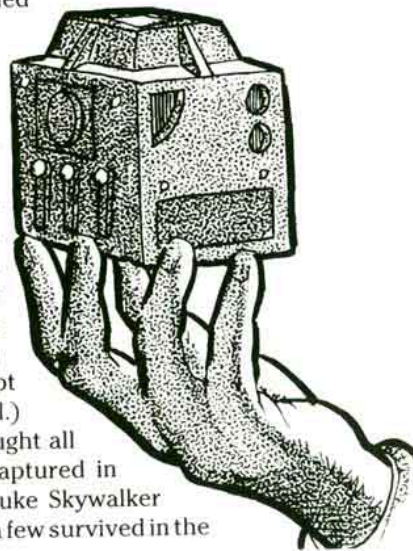
(A sample of Uueg Tching's wisdom can be found on page 29 of the *Imperial Soucebook*.)

Holocrons

Although the Jedi Masters insisted on individually training their students, they were not foolish and did not completely rely on oral tradition. Apparently the Jedi considered ordinary text or datalogs to lack an important transactive quality, and used pseudo-intelligent holographic chronicles ("Holocrons") as a primary form of recording. This method allowed a level of safety that no datafile could: the Holocrons only responded to a real Jedi.

The Jedi must have had very advanced techniques for such devices, for it is only recently that artificial intelligence and holography have been able to approach the level of quality that are attributed to ancient Holocrons. (Palpatine is reported to have dismissed the Holocrons as "primitive," but this may indicate that he had difficulty accessing them; he was known to express contempt for anything he could not control.)

Until very recently it was thought all Holocrons were destroyed or captured in Palpatine's purge of the Jedi. Luke Skywalker recently discovered that at least a few survived in the



Emperor's vaults, and he managed to recover one. This gives hope that others may yet be retrieved. It is even possible that a few lay hidden away, preserved by Jedi Masters who foresaw the black times ahead.

Holocrons were fantastically rare even before Palpatine's rise. Today, in a galaxy with only one Jedi Master, they are infinitely more precious. Of course, there are many competitors for such a fantastic rarity—collectors would pay millions for such a device, even though they could never use it. Since a Holocron is priceless, these millions of credits are likely to go to pay the thieves, mercenaries, and smugglers who would acquire, guard, and transport the item, not to tempt anyone who currently "owned" it.

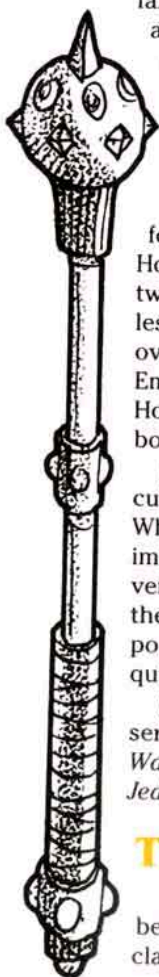
Then, too, there are Dark Adepts, Palpatine's former students, who would slay worlds to prevent a Holocron from entering Luke Skywalker's hands. These twisted beings have fantastic eldritch powers, bottomless hungers, and no longer have to answer to their overlord. I can't go into details, but I can say that the Emperor's Adepts have pursued even faint rumors of Holocrons with vigor and have littered their path with bodies. They are not to be underestimated.

Holocrons are generally simple geometric solids—cubes, pyramids, spheres, tetrahedrons, and so forth. When activated, a Holocron projects a particular Jedi's image, which answers questions and can hold a conversation with the student. The versatility and range of the holo-Jedi has yet to be determined, although reports indicate that interaction with the image seems quite real, as if speaking to a person via a hololink.

(Holocrons appear throughout the *Tales of the Jedi* series—including *Dark Lords of the Sith* and *The Sith War*—from Dark Horse Comics, and in the *Tales of the Jedi Companion*.)

The Cirra Mace

The Cirra Mace is an important ceremonial weapon belonging to the Cirra akia, the most warlike of the clans of the isolationist Aramandi people in Brak



Sector. The mace was stolen by an irate Seela (an Aramandi heretic-outcast) about 20 years ago. The Seela thief was caught before escaping the Aramand Cluster, but not before the mace was sold to an unknown third party. It vanished for fifteen years.

Five years ago, the Cirra Mace was offered for sale on the underground market in Brenn, the largest city of Genesis, also in Brak sector. Rumors claim that the mace was sold to a Nalroni merchant. Cirra warriors, most uncharacteristically off world, searched the city from one end to the other to find the mace, but it slipped through their fingers. Nalroni have been considered thieves by Cirra warriors since this incident.

Recently, rumors have circulated that the mace is in Celanon City, on the Nalroni homeworld, Celanon. No Cirra are known to have travelled to Celanon City to pursue these rumors, although the Cirra are well outside the usual grapevines and simply may not have heard these rumors yet.

The Cirra Mace is an 80-centimeter-long black obsidian mace, crowned with emeralds and rubies. It is not said to have strange powers or curses (as so many legendary objects are), but is important to Cirra akia religious ceremonies, which we know very little about. Recovering the mace would go far toward improving diplomatic relationships between the New Republic and the Aramandi Cluster, which includes not only the Cirra akia, but three other akia spread among the five worlds of the Cluster.

(For more information on the Aramandi, see pages 63–70 of *Flashpoint: Brak Sector*.)

The Loag Dagger

The Loag Dagger is the symbol of the Loag, an assassin cult that once flourished on the planet Merisee and terrorized the population in the days of the Old Republic. A band of six Jedi Knights came to Merisee and broke the Loag's power in a year-long campaign, during which they seized the ceremonial dagger that the first Loag cultists and all candidates swore a blood oath on. The three surviving Jedi took the dagger with them when they left Merisee, eventually



Against the Loag!

The Loag cult never actually died out. When it became clear to the cult leaders that they would lose to the Jedi, the best and most able assassins went into hiding. The rest were gradually ordered on suicide missions against the Jedi, and it seemed that the cult was extinct.

Only certain people outside the cult were allowed to know that the Loag continued, and they became the contacts between clients and assassins. The veil of secrecy continued when the Empire rose. Now that both the Jedi and the Empire are gone, the Loag is willing to risk exposure, especially if it means they can regain their dagger. This doesn't mean they'll casually reveal their existence.

The Loag organize themselves into cells of three to five. Contact between cells is very limited. If the Loag are exposed, the cell revealed allows itself to be destroyed (the Loag commit suicide to evade capture) and the other cells go to ground. Anyone who exposes and destroys a Loag cell becomes a target for other cells, but not for at least six months, during which time the cultists are snow-pure, law-abiding citizens while they wait for the heat to die down.

What has happened to the Loag Dagger is up to the individual gamemaster, but it should have been removed from Coruscant. Once retrieved, which might take a whole game session, the

depositing it in the Galactic Museum on Coruscant.

It stayed there as a reminder of the Jedi's service to the galaxy (for the Loag were hired as assassins by many offworlders and had a fearsome reputation across the Old Republic). In the Empire, the dagger was displayed as an example of how insurrectionists could threaten public order (the Jedi were only referred to as "Servants of the Galactic Order" in the official Imperial version).

When the New Republic was restored to Coruscant after the Empire's resurgence, the Imperial Museum collection had to be inventoried to assess the damage done by looters. That effort continues, but the Loag Dagger is among the confirmed items missing. Anything could have happened to it. It might be used as a kitchen knife for all we know, but it is definitely missing.

What makes this particular item interesting is the partially

characters must battle first one, then three, and, if they can handle it, a band of five Loag cultists, all of whom are extremely deadly and committed to regaining the dagger.

Typical Loag Assassin

Type: Assassin

DEXTERITY 4D

Blaster 7D, brawling parry 6D, dodge 8D, grenade 7D, melee combat 7D, melee parry 6D, missile weapons 7D, pick pocket 6D, running 8D, thrown weapons 6D

KNOWLEDGE 3D

Alien species 4D, intimidation 7D, languages 4D, streetwise 4D, survival 6D, willpower 6D

MECHANICAL 2D

Beast riding 5D, communications 4D, ground vehicle operation 5D, hover vehicle operation 5D, repulsorlift operation 5D, swoop operation 4D

PERCEPTION 3D

Command 6D, con 7D, hide 7D, persuasion 5D, search 6D, sneak 8D

STRENGTH 4D

Brawling 7D, climbing/jumping 6D, stamina 6D, swimming 6D

TECHNICAL 2D

Blaster repair 4D, computer programming/repair 4D, demolition 5D, first aid 5D, security 5D

Force Points: Varies; typically 0–5

Dark Side Points: Varies; typically 0–5

Character Points: Varies; typically 3–15

Move: 10

Equipment: Blaster pistol (4D), Merisee curved dagger (STR+1D, 3D for poison for five rounds), zolall poison vial (10 doses, lasts for four hits or two hours), camouflage clothing (+1D to *sneak* in darkness), comlink, molecular climbing spikes (+2D to *climbing*).

confirmed rumor that the Loag has been resurrected. It is suspected that Loag assassins have been the instruments of three recent political murders. If the Loag has returned, it would stop at nothing to reclaim the centerpiece of the cult.

The Loag Dagger is a 30-centimeter-long weapon with a one-sided curved and blackened blade. The hilt is wrapped in dark hide and the pommel has a dark red ruby as a cap.

(Material on Merisee and the Loag can be found on pages 159–160 of the *Star Wars Planets Collection*.)

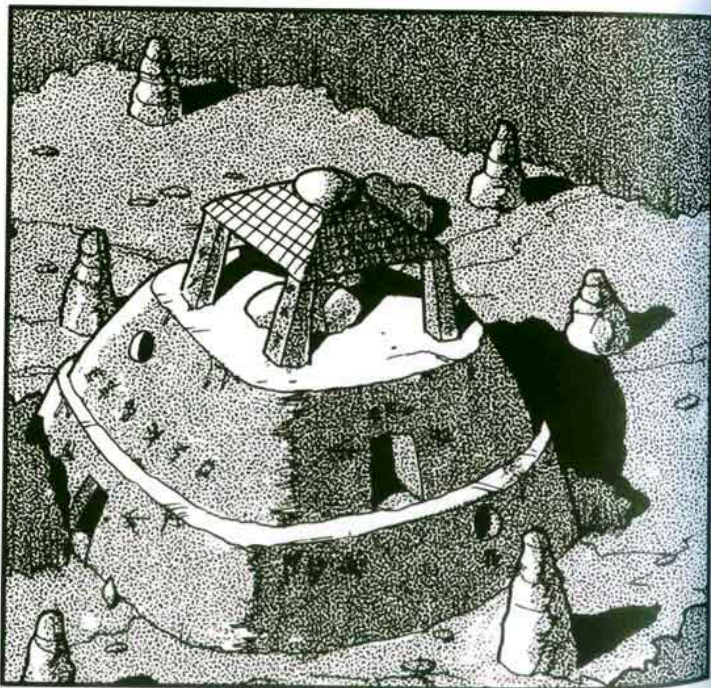
The Shrines of Kooroo

Scattered on remote planets in certain areas of the Outer Rim, the mysterious Shrines of Kooroo, all constructed of the same

natural stone (even on Gelgelar, where the only stone around is meters or decameters deep subterranean bedrock), are a source of scholarly and popular interest.

The shrines are simply and similarly constructed: three levels, two enclosed, and one, the top level, with a raised roof over a round solid stone structure with an unknown function. The center of the two lower levels is solid, to support the mound above. The rest of the shrine has openings and chambers, also serving unknown functions. Some of these chambers are covered with hieroglyphics, art, and in some cases, holographs. The shrines are surrounded by stone obelisks and monoliths in a regular pattern, radiating out in 100-meter circles around the main structure.

It is generally accepted that the shrines were constructed by an alien species, probably with limited telepathy. This species recorded no war, weapons, or armor, and is thus thought to have been deeply peaceful. The Kooroo species (the origin of the name is obscure) was never encountered by the Old Republic, their



homeworld has not been identified, and they seem to be extinct. Experts estimate many of these structures are over 20,000 years old.

Some of the shrines were taken over by native intelligent species for their own religious ceremonies and added to or reworked. On some worlds the co-opted shrines were claimed as the natives' own. On others they were remembered as the constructs of an ancient people. Only a few species recall that they had been built by off-worlders. Some shrines were destroyed by local cultures as alien and frightening.

Theories abound about the Kooroo Shrines. Stories of bloody sacrifices and obscene festivals circulated soon after the discovery of the shrines by the Old Republic. These were eventually discounted, although they remain popular. A mystic cult, the Fellowship of Kooroo, has appeared in recent times, claiming to have special insight gained from extensive contemplation and meditation in the shrines. This may or may not be true: Force-aware individuals have reported that the shrines "echoed" to their senses, although no practical use is known for this effect. It is true that several leaders in the Kooroo sect are known to be bilking their followers with simple tricks and nonsense. Nine Kooroo leaders are known to be siphoning off funds for their own use, this only in the few years since the establishment of the New Republic.

One theory is that the shrines served the Kooroo civilization as a kind of communication network, boosting their telepathic powers enough to overcome vast interstellar distances. This is an intriguing theory, but evidence is lacking.

Another popular theory is that the Kooroo had a very limited interstellar technology, and used the shrines to mentally visit other worlds without actually travelling to them. In this theory the shrines served as a focus for the visiting Kooroo mind.

An even more outlandish idea is that the Kooroo had vast mental powers, and used the shrines as translocation points for mentally moving themselves through space and time. This is generally considered bad fiction.

The shrines are not known to present any threat themselves, although the sometimes unpredictable Followers of Kooroo may. The shrines are still of an unknown quantity, and should be carefully monitored. Please report any newly discovered shrines to the New Republic Antiquities Office.

Some information on the Gelgelar Shrine of Kooroo can be found

Ideas Using the Shrines of Kooroo

The nature and powers of the shrines are up to the gamemaster to determine, but here are some ideas to play with:

- The shrines are ancient communication nodes for telepaths. Anyone using a telepathic power in one of the shrines transmits to any telepath also in a shrine anywhere else. With practice, the transmitting telepath should be able to communicate with a particular telepath in a shrine. Telepathy could include a particular species-specific power, any sort of mental communication, or only Kooroo telepathy, depending on the needs of the gamemaster.
- The shrines are psychic batteries set up in a network. Using the Force—including Character Points, Force Points, or Force powers—is much easier in a shrine. Two dice are rolled per Character Point, die codes triple for a Force Point, and difficulties are halved for powers. Of course, this doubles the chances of acquiring a Dark Side Point for questionable actions.
- The shrines are energy collectors for the ancient and evil Kooroo, who were banished to Otherspace millennia ago by their enemies. The Kooroo didn't need to make war—they took over planets by sheer mental power. The Kooroo still lurk in Otherspace, waiting for a gateway back to this universe. The rites

and meditations conducted by the Fellowship of Kooroo feed the Kooroo, who plan to use the energy to make contact with a powerful Force-user or other telepath on this side. Once contact has been made, they will instruct the telepath on how to open a gate between dimensions—this requires a horrible dark side ceremony, which is long and difficult, needs rare materials, and requires the cooperation of a congregation of followers simultaneously performing the ritual at a minimum of three shrines.

- The shrines are repositories of the knowledge and experience of the wisest of the benevolent Kooroo. The Kooroo knew they were dying out, and mentally imprinted the shrines with the collected experience of a single great mind, something like a Jedi Holocron, to leave to younger species. This information can be accessed only by a properly trained telepath, using a technique encoded into the art and hieroglyphs that decorate the shrines. Each shrine requires a different technique, but once the cipher is broken the code is not hard to read. "Reading" the shrines might require a Heroic *Perception* roll for natural telepaths or a Heroic *receptive telepathy* roll for Force-users. Success cannot be achieved without weeks of study and contemplative meditation at one of the shrines.

in *Platt's Starport Guide*. Sensationalist newsnet reporter Andor Javin's theories on the shrines' origins were originally presented in "Galaxywide NewsNets" in *Star Wars Adventure Journal* #13.

The Emperor's Yacht

For years, both Imperial and Alliance High Command were tantalized by rumors that a working cloaking device had been developed by an Imperial black project, a project so secret that no records were kept and no one outside the research group other than the Emperor knew anything concrete about it. Imperial ships had used stealth technology for years, of course, (and these systems were occasionally called "cloaks"), but the real goal of stealth technology was a full cloak, a device that made a ship undetectable.

Even today, in the wake of Thrawn's use of cloaking devices, we have very incomplete information on this project. We know that the Emperor had an operational cloaking model. It is believed that certain of the Emperor's personal ships, including his yacht and shuttle, were equipped with a full cloak. It is not known how many other ships were equipped with cloaks.

The Emperor's personal shuttle was destroyed at Endor. His yacht, the *Emperor's Shadow*, was under the command of one of his adepts, Jeng Droga, when it disappeared at about the same time as the Battle of Endor. The *Shadow* is thought to have been in the Mid-Rim, near Kaal, when it vanished. A ship equipped with a functioning cloak can be expected to vanish, of course, and New Republic Intelligence considered the *Shadow* untraceable; however, a report from a New Republic negotiating team indicates the yacht may have crashed on Kaal, possibly in a shallow area of its planetary ocean.

Expedition to Kaal

A few years after Endor, a New Republic diplomatic mission to Kaal encountered a fortune-hunter calling himself Pandis Hart (actually Talon Karrde) who was after the *Emperor's Shadow*. An associate of his, Quelev Tapper, located a likely vessel underneath Kaal's seas and rigged it to blow up by remote control. When Hart's attempt to gain exclusive access to the ship failed, he blew up the ship rather than let someone else have it (as described in "The Kaal Connection" from *Star Wars Adventure Journal* #7). This ship may or may not have been the *Shadow*.

If the yacht did crash on Kaal, but Tapper didn't find the right ship, it's still down there, waiting to be found. If the yacht crashed somewhere else, an expedition must go to Kaal to figure that out, then determine where it did crash.

Of course, news of a mission to recover the *Shadow* would reach the remains of the Imperial intelligence services, and possibly the ears of one or more of the more powerful corporations. Competition to raise the *Shadow* will be fierce.

The Dark Side Adept Jeng Droga's fate remains unknown. He was mentally affected by his master's death; if he survived it is likely he stands guard over his charge until his master calls him. Droga wasn't the most powerful of the Emperor's servants, but he was one of the most loyal and would take any attempt to recover the yacht very poorly...

A ship suspected to be the *Shadow* was demolished by an interested third party in order to deny it to the competition. There was no known confirmation that the ship was the *Shadow*, nor any confirmation a cloak was installed. Further investigation is called for. Excavation of a wreck on Kaal is likely to attract the interest of Imperial parties or other competitors, so any attempt to investigate or recover the *Shadow* should be under cover or in force. The Galactic Museum Artifact Recovery Office is willing to fund an undercover expedition.

Cloaking fields and other stealth devices are discussed on page 66 of the *Imperial Sourcebook*.

Sharka'k Noor

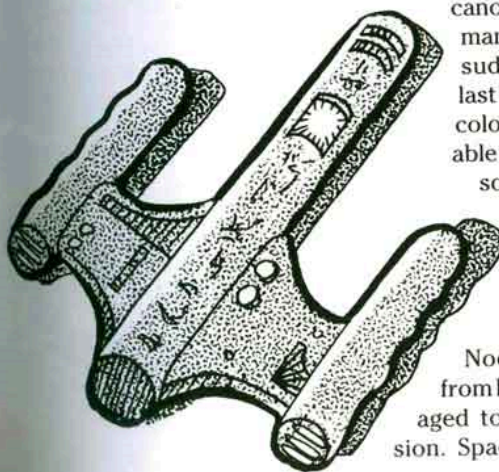
The Gree are an ancient species with a millions-year-old civilization. Their technology, very different from our own, mastered hyperspatial transit and picotechnology ages before most species discovered fire. Their golden age ended millennia before the Old Republic was founded. By the time the Republic encountered a Gree world, their culture had degenerated immensely.

Fantastic items still survive, operated by Gree masters who jealously retain old knowledge. Some of these relics are capable of feats in apparent violation of known physics. Each is unique.

A few years ago, I was part of a small secret, expedition to the planet Asation, the doorway to the Gree Enclave. An attempt to acquire an abandoned Gree artifact failed, but I managed to leave the world with mind and body intact, unlike most of the expedition—the Gree are very proprietary.

I recently caught word that another expedition was more successful. A team led by Dr. Iis Ee apparently acquired a device called the Sharka'k Noor. The Noor was once the premier device in Sharka'k's collection. Sharka'k died on Asation without passing the secrets of the Noor on to any apprentice, so the Noor passed into the possession of the Te Hasan Gree, the Keepers of Artifacts. Before the Te Hasans could lay claim to the Noor, Dr. Ee, a person of dubious ethics, stole it. Ee escaped the remote Gree Enclave and was last seen on Tujiamoor shortly before the Talecalde volcanic eruptions. The Talecalde volcano chain had been dormant for 3,000 years until it suddenly became active last month, killing 400,000 colonists. It seems reasonable to suspect that the Noor somehow activated the volcanoes. Perhaps Ee was experimenting with the Noor. Perhaps not.

Assuming that the Noor protects the user from harm, Ee probably managed to escape in the confusion. Space traffic control sen-



The Noor

The Noor is a fairly small device, about 20 centimeters long, made up of three parallel tubes with odd glyphs engraved along the central tube. The central tube also has a color-coded display on one side. Each of the two outer tubes have four fingertip-sized depressions on them. The Noor was built to be operated by the four-tentacled Gree, and is hard for a non-Gree to work at all. Dr. Ee will never be able to correctly operate it. The Noor emits a deep bass tone that fluctuates in a slow, groaning melody as the controls are worked.

The Noor manipulates geologic activity. It can cause or ease earthquakes, create new volcanoes, stir a planet's mantle, or otherwise affect a planetary core. It could be a devastating weapon, of course, though it is primarily a planetary engineering tool.

If the Gree discover the Noor's location, they are likely to come after it, and have other devices to aid them; devices that actually are intended to be weapons...

More information on the Gree and their culture and technology is available in "The Gree Enclave" in *The Official Star Wars Adventure Journal* # 8 pages 41-66, reprinted in *Classic Adventures: Volume Four*, pages 17-29.

sors were disrupted by lava flow and volcanic ash, and Ee could have easily lifted off without being noticed. Assuming that Ee will try to master the Noor, interested parties should keep a close watch on seismic reports from planets near Tujiamoor. Unusual seismic activity should be investigated.

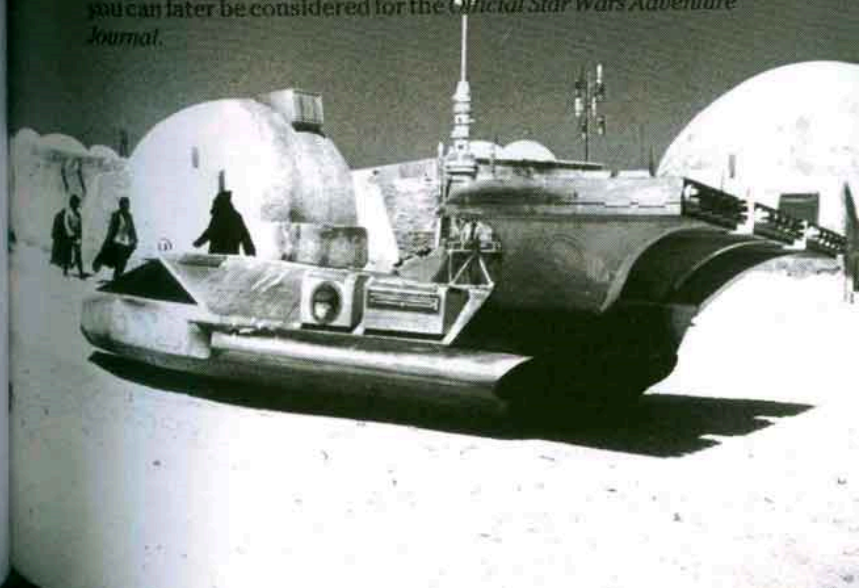
JOURNAL SUBMISSIONS POLICY

The *Official Star Wars Adventure Journal* has been asked by Lucasfilm to solicit material only from previously published authors. Therefore, we must require potential writers to meet the following guidelines.

If you are a published author, please send a brief cover letter outlining your interests in writing for *Star Wars* as well as your writing experience. Include a bibliography of previously published works and samples from that list. Please include your daytime phone number so we can contact you.

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If you are not a published author, we encourage you to pursue publishing your writing in other areas. It has been our experience that some of our industry's best writers are newcomers to the field. Newspaper, magazine, and fanzine editors often seek freelance authors to help fill their pages—this is a good place to gain some writing and publishing experience so you can later be considered for the *Official Star Wars Adventure Journal*.



An aging storyteller weaves a tall tale involving the most notorious bounty hunter in the galaxy. But is it all just made up for entertainment, or is there a grain of truth to the fable?

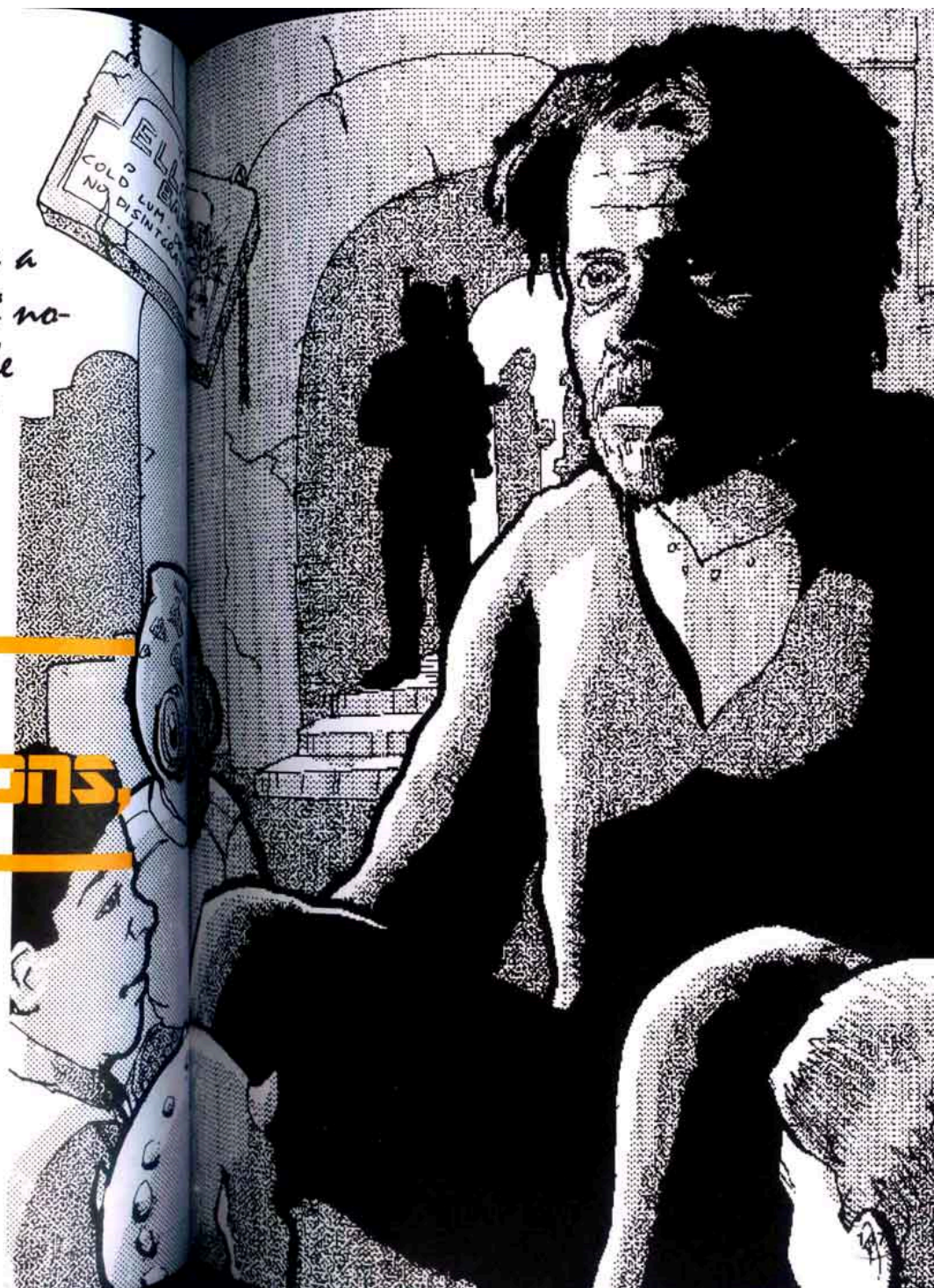
No Disintegrations, Please

By Paul Danner

Illustrations by Matt Busch

Squeak.
Squeak.
Squeak.

Most beings would have found the intermittent sound annoying. Some might have even gone so far as to blast the noisy repliwood sign into toothpicks. But the main street of the New Hope Settle-



ment was currently devoid of life. There were only a few dustballs moving in accordance to the fickle will of the wind. The row of stores that flanked the main street stood silently, sealed up and forgotten. The rust-colored sands of Ladarra were already returning to reclaim the land it had lost years ago...

And so the sign continued to squeak, hanging as it was by a single frayed duracable. The lettering was a bit faded, but the words were still legible: "The Ellstree Bar—Cold Lum; Droids Welcome; No Disintegrations, Please..." Like the rest of the shops in downtown New Hope, the bar looked to be long deserted. But as the old saying goes, "appearance and truth have as much in common as Jawas and Hutts."

The children sat in a semi-circle around the man. There were at least a dozen of them, mostly human, but a few other species were represented as well. They were orphans and urchins, the last generation of a failed colony—too poor to book passage off Ladarra and unwilling or unable to face the difficulties of life in the few larger cities on the planet.

The man had no name as far as the children knew. They merely called him the Storyteller. He was dressed as they were, in ragged clothing scrounged from a dozen wardrobes and cobbled together into a free-form garment. The Storyteller was an older human, with a heavily lined face and a shock of white hair. He had the look of a man who had seen too much and his eyes were unable to stay focused on any one location for longer than a minute—as if they were constantly searching for any possible threat.

"You want *another* story?" he asked in a weary voice.

The children nodded in unison. They rarely spoke and he wasn't sure all of them even knew how.

"How about the legend of the fearless young Jedi Knight who rescued a beautiful princess?"

A chorus of groans answered that question.

"Well, then. There's always the tale of the evil Imperial governor who wanted to conquer the innocent little world of—" He saw the looks on their faces and couldn't help but laugh. "No? My, but this is a tough crowd." He shook his head in mock irritation. "So what would you like to hear about?"

"Tell us a new one," one of the children said. She was a pretty little one, though it was hard to tell under all that grime.

"Come now, you've heard all of them at least once. Just pick the one you like."

The girl folded her arms and jutted out her lower lip. He fought to keep a straight face. "Okay, okay...." He scratched his chin in dramatic fashion. "A new story. Let me see...ah, yes I've got it!"

Their eyes lit up.

"No, no...that won't work."

The children frowned at him.

"Kidding, kidding," he chuckled for a moment, then quickly grew serious. "I do have one tale that I heard a long time ago. To my knowledge it has never been told again." He had their full attention. "How many of you have heard of..." His voice lowered to a dangerous whisper. "*Boba Fett*?"

Their eyes grew wide at the mention of the name, and one by one each little hand lifted into the air.

"Well, I happen to know a long-forgotten tale of the greatest bounty hunter who ever lived. Would you like me to share it with you?"

Every head in the room slowly nodded.

The Storyteller had his audience...he smiled briefly, then settled back into the comfortable chair and slowly closed his eyes. He began the story after a moment of dramatic silence. The children listened with rapt attention.



As the shuttle's exit hatch slowly descended, the sudden hiss of escaping gases nearly caused Rivo to jump right off the platform. As it was, he barely regained enough balance in time to prevent himself from unceremoniously rolling down the ramp.

General Gaega Xarran gave a dramatic sigh to indicate his disgust and extended an arm to steady his brother as he stumbled down the ramp.

Xarran quickly glanced at the sharp line of stormtroopers that served as an honor guard. The squad remained at such rigid attention that he momentarily wondered if the Dark Lord of the Sith had suddenly emerged from the *Lambda*-class shuttle. The Empire's

ivory-armored shock troopers weren't always the brightest specimens around, but at least they knew enough to keep their mouths shut and follow orders.

Unlike some people, the General thought as his gaze fell upon Rivo. Xarran suddenly felt his body grow flushed with anger and his lips twitched into an involuntary sneer.

"How could you be so stupid?" he whispered. Not that it really mattered whether the stormtroopers overheard; they had been privy to conversations of much greater importance than the scolding of a sibling.

Rivo might as well have been one of the silent group of guards, for he acted as if his brother had never spoken. His eyes were still darting around wildly, searching for a possible threat in every shadow.

Xarran lightly cuffed his brother with an open hand, striking the back of his head. If there was one thing the General did not like, it was being ignored. "Answer me!"

Rivo's response was swift—Xarran was doubly shocked as he stared down the stubby barrel of a hold-out blaster. First of all, the General had never imagined his own brother would point a weapon at him, and second Rivo was supposed to have been relieved of his armaments. Someone was destined to die for the oversight, but the General intended to avoid being the unlucky party.

It was his brother's life, however, that appeared to be in the most immediate danger....

The stormtroopers remained motionless, but somewhere in the span of an eye-blink nine blaster rifles had been expertly trained on Rivo.

The young man didn't seem to notice. His eyes held a blank stare that didn't quite focus on anything. The General wasn't even quite sure if Rivo still recognized him.

"It's only me, brother," Xarran said softly. "I'm the one trying to keep you alive." Slowly but steadily the General reached out with a gloved hand. The span was less than half a meter, but it took forever to close the distance between his fingers and the weapon.

When the General took hold of the blaster, Rivo's nervous energy drained out as if he were a leaking power cell. His entire body slumped down and the weapon spilled like liquid through his fingers until it was collected in Xarran's waiting hands.

"I'm sorry," Rivo managed through choked sobs. He wavered unsteadily, lost in his anguish.

Xarran pulled him into a hug, nodding to the guards over Rivo's shoulder. The gesture was unnecessary. Their blasters were already holstered.

The General cradled the back of his brother's head, in the same place where moments before Xarran had struck him. That now seemed like an eternity ago—it suddenly became clear to him how time, no matter how brief, could irrevocably affect one's entire existence. Every moment was a crossroad to infinite possibilities—Rivo's greatest talent besides drinking and gambling was picking the wrong path to travel. Fortunately the results, as bad as they were, had never ended with outright disaster. This time was different, however, for Rivo's latest mistake might end up costing his life.

Of course, it went without saying that Xarran would do everything in his power to prevent that occurrence. And as a General in the Imperial Army, that power was considerable.

Xarran gently supported his brother, helping him walk the long landing platform toward the garrison complex. The stormtroopers executed a crisp about-face and fell into line behind them. "You'll have nothing to fear anymore, brother. I doubt anyone could have tracked you here."

Rivo gazed up at his brother and for the first time, there was a glimmer of recognition in his eyes.

Heartened by the small gesture, Xarran continued. "And in the highly unlikely event that you were followed, one would have to be certifiably insane to even consider attacking an entire Imperial garrison."



In the distance, well-concealed high in the cover afforded by the dense foliage, a silent figure lurked in the shadows.

He watched, though he held no macrobinoculars—for a pair was conveniently built into his battle-scarred helmet.

He listened as easily if he were one of the stormtroopers, his broad-band antenna de-scrambling the signal of their comlinks and effectively turning the silent soldiers into eavesdropping devices.

Once again, nothing escaped his notice.

Just as no one escaped him.

He climbed down from his perch among the trees with surprising grace considering the bulkiness of his battered gray and green armor.

By the time he finished his descent, darkness had begun to fall like a velvet blanket, and the twin moons of Vryssa were steadily rising in the northern sky.

He paused only once to stare at the towering silhouette of the Imperial garrison base. The massive structure remained in shadow for a few moments longer, then its powerful spot-lumas ignited. The harsh light was coldly reflected in the figure's mask.

General Xarran had unwittingly issued an arrogant challenge. A challenge Boba Fett was more than ready to accept....



The speeder bike patrol caught him unaware. He had just climbed down from his overlook and was checking his equipment. His motion sensors didn't go off until they were right on top of him. The bikes were so fast they didn't register with enough warning time.

As he dove for cover in the thick tangle of bush, Fett saw one of the scout troopers gesture in his general direction. His two partners immediately circled around, moving into standard Imperial flanking position. Their vehicles were newer models, pure scout bikes by the look of them—very fast, but without any armaments or protection.

Fett needed to know how much they knew. He activated his antenna....

"...Saw something through those trees. Hard to tell, though. Could have just been a buldobeast."

"Keep your positions. I'll check it out."

"Acknowledged."

"Should we contact the other patrol?"

"You want to listen to their jokes about getting spooked by a little buldo?"

"Negative."

"That's what I thought. Now, stand by."

Fett watched as the lead biker approached, giving his vehicle minimal throttle. The repulsorlift craft drifted a few meters above the ground as the scout trooper conducted a grid search of the area.

Ever so slowly, Fett rolled onto his back and snaked his right arm up through the thicket. He took a single deep breath and then his body froze. The hunter was so still it seemed as if he were made of ferrocrete.

The scout biker moved overhead, directly above Fett's hiding place. The hunter could feel the backwash from the repulsorlift engines pressing against him. The scout was leaning over his vehicle, examining the area closely. The trooper's head jerked back suddenly as if he had spotted something.

Fett flexed his wrist and the rocket-propelled dart housed in his forearm compartment streaked silently through the air. The hunter's aim was perfect. The dart jammed into the soft black bodysuit between the scout's helmet and chestpiece. The poison worked fast, starting with the victim's vocal cords. The man silently jerked forward and then tumbled from his seat, leaving the speeder bike hovering in place.

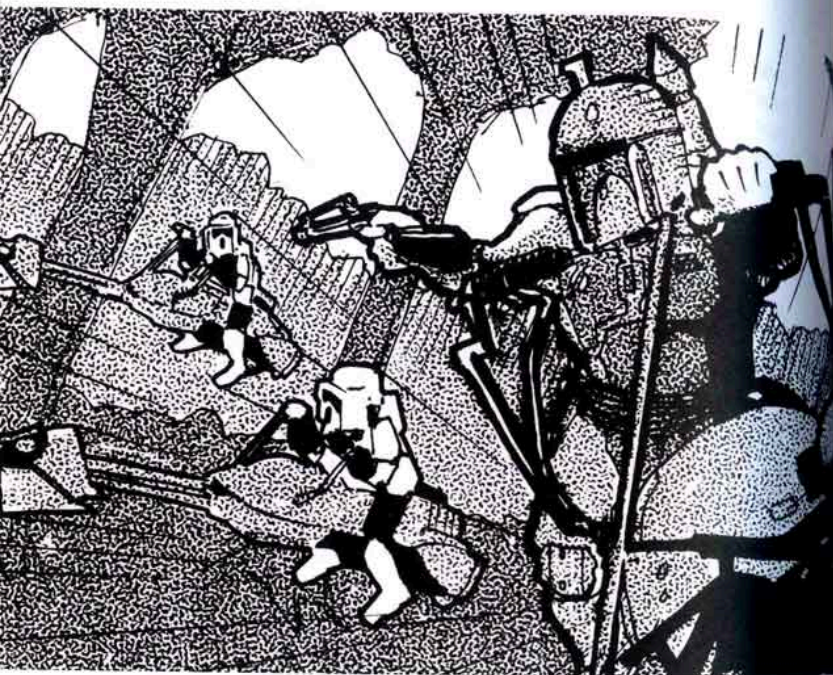
Moving quickly, Fett hopped up onto the bike and jammed the comlinks of the other two bikers. He opened up the throttle and veered off toward one of them. Without even a glance at the other, the hunter activated his armor's grenade launcher.

The trooper was shocked to see Fett streak past on the speeder bike going after his partner. Figuring he had the drop on the hunter, he gunned his bike forward—just as Fett's grenade finished its arc and fell into his lap.

The bounty hunter felt the shock wave of the blast but didn't bother to look back. He was too busy concentrating on his final target. This trooper was taking no chances. The scout was hightailing it out of the vicinity in order to escape the jamming and get some help. He already had a sizable lead on the hunter and was rapidly increasing the gap. Fett knew he couldn't catch up—the trooper was more familiar with the terrain.

Steering the vehicle with one hand, the bounty hunter drew his modified blaster rifle. Scomp-linked to the macrobinoculars in his helmet, the weapon finally locked on target at 300 meters. The scout trooper didn't even see the two angry crimson blaster bolts that slammed into his back and took him clean off his vehicle.

Fett slowed his bike to a stop and scanned the area for anyone else.



The hunter was not happy—he had expended unnecessary time and energy. And now they would know for sure he was on the planet. Perhaps that might be to his advantage....



Rivo's voice cut the silence, though it was but a whisper. "He's here. Now."

"Impossible," Xarran said, barely keeping the disgust from his voice. The General did not like to see his brother cower. Especially in front of his men. "You give this bounty hunter too much credit, brother. Our sensors would have detected his ship's approach."

Rivo shook his head. "This bounty hunter is not the simple-minded scum you are used to dealing with. Boba Fett is different. He has never failed. They say he is the best that ever was...."

Commander Tyrix checked his console. "The patrol *should* have reported in by now, sir."

"This confirms it!" Rivo said.

Xarran would have none of it. "There is no reason to make any connection with your situation and this incident. For all we know—"

"Sir," Tyrix said. "Another patrol has found the remains of the missing unit...." The Commander listened for a moment, pressing his headset against his ear. He paled considerably. "They're all dead."

The General was on his feet. "How?"

"Blaster, a grenade and some sort of poisoned dart. The troopers' weapons were fully charged...none of the men even got off a shot."

Rivo let out a nervous giggle. "I told you...he's coming for me."

Xarran ignored him. "Commander, send out two detachments. If this bounty hunter is indeed here, then I want him found and brought before me. Preferably alive...although a body will do just fine."

"Two detachments, sir?" Tyrix swiveled his chair around to face the General. "For just one man?"

Xarran's face did not so much as twitch. "I'm sorry, Commander, did you say something?"

"No, sir," Tyrix said, hurriedly swiveling back to his console to activate the comlink.



Fett sat in the hunter's blind among a thick tangle of coilwood branches. He watched as the first wave of speeder bikes roared below him, buzzing along like bloodgnats. He felt the impact tremors as a pair of Imperial walkers lumbered by flanked by half dozen of their comical AT-ST counterparts. He shook his head in amazement as squad after squad of stormtroopers marched into the underbrush. Their bright white armor was not exactly the best forest camouflage.

This massive show of force told the bounty hunter all he needed to know about his opponents....

Two detachments meant they certainly knew he was here. And

they were nervous.

Behind the tinted faceplate of his battered helmet, Boba Fett actually smiled.



Xarran leaned over the tactical screen watching proudly as his forces deployed into the forest. He listened to the excited comm chatter as his men moved into position and began an expertly coordinated, utterly systematic search. There would be no escape. Not from the might of the Empire. The General snorted and crossed his arms over his barrel chest. "He's as good as ours."

As he spoke, all communications went dead.



Boba Fett double-checked the comm jamming unit. It was an advanced prototype and very powerful. Unfortunately, its duration was also extremely short: 58 minutes. And then it would explode.

He set his chronometer to countdown mode. Seconds began to vanish. He had just under an hour to eliminate two Imperial detachments.

The hunter turned and hefted his blaster rifle. Fett only foresaw one problem: what to do with the three minutes he would have to spare....



Perched on the edge of his seat in the walker's cockpit, Lieutenant Byrga smacked his lips in nervous anticipation. The AT-AT drivers exchanged a quick glance, but wouldn't dare to comment on the habit of a superior officer. Even if it was extremely irritating.

Byrga was staring so hard at the sensor readouts that his eyeballs were on the verge of jettisoning themselves free of his head. The Lieutenant didn't like the fact that they had lost communications. Despite all efforts, they could not make contact with the rest of their detachment or the garrison base. That made Byrga anxious. His lips were smacking on overdrive.

"Don't worry," he said trying to reassure the rest of the command crew, who had learned to ignore his rantings and still do their jobs effectively. "We are the best the Empire has to offer. No one escapes us. We will find this fool who dares oppose the will of Palpatine and crush him in the iron grip of the—"



The magnetic grapppler connected with the armored underbelly of the AT-AT and locked into place. The 20-meter lanyard trailing behind it pulled taut and a small armored figure emerged from out of the dense underbrush. Fett calmly waited for the winch in his armored suit to elevate him up to the walker's stomach.

The hunter used the time to power up his wrist lasers.



Byrga's ramblings continued. The one good thing about that, at least for the rest of the command crew, was when his mouth was running there was a cessation of lip-smacking. "Make me proud, men. I want to be the one who finds this bounty hunter."

The Lieutenant abruptly cocked his head to one side. "Did anyone else hear that?"

The drivers shook their heads.

Byrga turned toward the dark tunnel leading back into the walker's passenger compartment. "That's strange. We're not carrying any troops." He activated the blast door and peered inside. After a moment's decision he placed one hand on his holstered blaster and slowly walked into the AT-AT's neck. "I'll be right back,

men. Carry on without me for a moment."
The drivers happily complied.



"I want all communications back on-line!" Frustrated, Xarran screamed into the internal comlink, "Immediately!"

Commander Tyrix sighed and gritted his teeth. "Uh, sir...the blackout is affecting the intercom as well." His voice lowered to almost a whisper. "The engineering teams can't hear you."

The General was at Tyrix's console in three strides. Xarran's face was so close the Commander could count the veins bulging in the man's forehead.

Xarran spoke through gritted teeth, the words slow and precise. "Then get down there and tell them."

"Yes, sir!" Tyrix said as he dove into the nearest turbolift.



The AT-AT drivers were so entranced by the wonderful silence in the cockpit they didn't even notice the unusually long absence of their commanding officer. That was their first mistake. When the blast door finally slid open again they didn't even bother to look up from their consoles. As it turned out, that oversight was their last.

Boba Fett lowered his smoking blaster rifle and took a moment to admire his new mode of transportation.



Lieutenant Grejj sat back in his command chair, fingertips steepled in front of his face. The walker's command crew was doing a fine job considering the circumstances. He only hoped they could

get communications back on-line as quickly as possible. Then they could eliminate the bounty hunter and resume normal duties. Grejj liked his routine. He did not like surprises.

"Sir! We're picking something up on sensors."

The Lieutenant leaned forward. "What is it?"

The driver shook his head. "Just another walker...must be Lieutenant Byrga."

"Let's go see if his hunting has been more fortuitous."

"He must have already seen us," the driver said. "Here they come now."

Grejj nodded, reaching for the cockpit release lever. "With any luck this will be over soon."



As a matter of fact, it was.

The remains of Lieutenant Grejj's AT-AT and a pair of AT-STs that had stumbled onto the fight were scattered along the ground. The two smaller walkers were so confused by the duel between their larger siblings that they had actually opened fire on Grejj.

Fett guided his AT-AT through the smoking debris as his sensors picked up a large grouping of stormtroopers nearby. The hunter checked his chronometer and noted that he was right on schedule.



"Communications have been restored, sir."

"Finally! Patch me through directly to our forces." Tyrix's fingers flew over his console and he quickly signaled his success with a nod to the General.

Xarran reached for his comlink. "Xarran to Alpha and Delta Groups. All units are to report status immediately."

There was silence.

Rivo gave his brother a meaningful glance, but Xarran ignored him and tried again. "I repeat, this is General Xarran ordering all

units to account current status. Alpha Group...report."

Nothing.

A bead of sweat trickled down the General's forehead. He leaned closer to the mike. "Delta Group...report."

Again, there was not a sound.

Xarran stared accusingly at Tyrix. "You must have been in error, Commander. The comm system is still down."

"I regret to inform you, sir. It is functioning within normal parameters. Our forces should be responding."

"Yet that is not the case." Xarran's voice had lost a bit of its hard edge. "Why?"

Rivo answered with a plaintive wail. "Because they're all dead!"

Xarran spun around, viciously backhanding his brother across the face. "Will you shut up!"

The unexpected blow sent Rivo crumpling to the deck where he cringed, holding up his hands in supplication. Xarran's face softened with regret immediately. He helped Rivo up and said in a low whisper, "Forgive me, brother...."

"Wait a minute!" Tyrix nearly jumped from his console. "General, sensors are picking up one of our walkers at the outer perimeter."

Xarran beamed. "Put it on the viewscreen."

Tyrix complied and the image of a battle-scarred AT-AT filled the viewer.

"Returning in victory?" the Commander said.

"Let's find out." Xarran tried the comlink again. "Base to walker. Report."

A gout of fire suddenly bloomed on the underbelly of the AT-AT followed by a loud explosion that sent a burst of static over the comlink. The walker lurched forward, like a mortally wounded behemoth, then fell. Its chin connected with the ground, and then the rest of its body followed suit, causing the soil to rumble. Then the metal monster disappeared in a haze of smoke and flame.

"What was that?" Tyrix blurted out.

"A message," Rivo said softly.

The base control room was absolutely still. No one dared to move or speak. Everyone was staring silently at the terrible image that loomed on the viewer.

Everyone that is, except for Xarran. The General stood up and slowly walked into his office, boots clacking on the deck plates. His voice echoed through the room. "Someone turn off that blasted thing...."

Tyrix shut off the screen, but as the rest of the base crew hurriedly resumed their duties he continued to stare at the dark viewer for a few moments. His gaze flickered across the room, and came to rest on Rivo. After 30 years of military service, the Commander had seen more than his share of horrible things, but the look of terror in Rivo's eyes sent a chill rippling down his spine.



Fett would have liked to have seen the General's expression when the AT-AT exploded. He probably shouldn't have wasted the thermal detonator, but the psychological effect on the man and his troops would be worth it.

Both sides had taken their feints and jabs—now it was time to move into the final round. Fett was almost sorry to see it come. The skirmishes before the main event always served as interesting diversions, especially since the outcome of his mission was never in doubt.

Boba Fett did not lose.



"What were you thinking of, Rivo?" Xarran was seated in the plush replihide chair behind a desk that dwarfed most landspeeders.

Rivo sat across from him in a much smaller seat. His eyes had apparently found something interesting on the floor. "Money," he mumbled after a moment. He finally made eye contact with his older brother. "What else is there? I was blinded by greed, Gaege. I never figured that Jabba would be able to track me as the source of his data leak."

"You didn't think that someone like Jabba the Hutt would have his own expert slicers? I always told you that your ego would be your undoing, didn't I? You may be good, but there will always be someone better. And that's true no matter if you're a slicer, a soldier, or a bounty hunter."

"The funny thing is, I didn't even mean to slice into Jabba's records. It was a complete accident. But once I found out what I had stumbled onto, I couldn't resist."

"You never could pass up a chance to make an easy credit," Xarran sighed. "Especially if it didn't involve honest work."

"I didn't come here for a lecture, brother. I came here for help." He stared out the transparisteel window that overlooked the lush forests of Vryssa. "Although from the looks of it, maybe I came to the wrong place."

The General's face twitched slightly. "Perhaps you'd have better luck out there by yourself. Feel free to leave anytime."

"Okay, so I messed up again. I apologize, Gaega...I know you're doing your best. I just never thought I'd be on the run from Boba Fett."

"You stole sensitive information from one of the most dangerous scumlord in the galaxy and then sold it to the highest bidder...how much did Jabba lose as a result of your actions?"

"Over 150,000 credits. But I don't think he really cares about the money. It's just the principle of the thing. The Hutt wants to make an example of me. And what Jabba wants, Jabba gets."

"Well, he isn't going to get you, brother. I don't care how many bounty hunters he sends."

"Do you really think Fett can be stopped?"

"The man is good. Very good. But I see his strategy now, and I refuse to play his game any longer. No more troops will leave the base. If he wants you, he will have to come here. And mark my words, no one can penetrate the 'death fence.' It's set for maximum voltage per my orders. The charge is so high the tiniest spark could fry a bantha in seconds." Xarran gave a thin-lipped smile. "No one gets out. And no one gets in."



Night had fallen on Vryssa.

Fett was crouched in the bushes, 20 meters away from the base's outer perimeter. The 10-meter-high wall surrounding the complex seemed to be alive, crackling as it was with azure arcs of electricity. The surges danced over the surface like writhing snakes.

The spot he picked was a good distance away from the nearest gate house, though stormtroopers constantly patrolled along the fortified catwalks set back from the fence. Observation towers were spaced about 100 meters apart along the catwalk and a combination of flood lights, detection sensors, and droids were used to maintain security. Fett's current position put him roughly 50 meters from the two flanking towers. It was a good distance, but he didn't think it would be enough to avoid detection.

Fett activated his internal comlink. It was time for a little distraction....



Slave I roared over the treeline, screaming toward the garrison base at full speed. Its sophisticated sensor-jamming array was fully powered and the hull itself was magnetically polarized to scramble and confuse enemy scans. As it was, the base was taken by surprise.

On its first pass the ship delivered a frighteningly potent volley of concussion missiles, proton torpedoes, blaster bolts, and ion blasts. The attack was so fierce that the base's powerful deflector shields fluctuated and the entire structure shuddered with the impact.



"See?" Xarran shouted from the command center. "The man has grown desperate! He knows there's no way in so he resorts to a suicide run." He focused his gaze on Rivo. "Everyone makes mistakes, sooner or later. And I will make sure it is his last."

Standing at one of the tactical stations, Tyrix turned to his commanding officer. "All turbolaser turrets are primed and ready, sir."

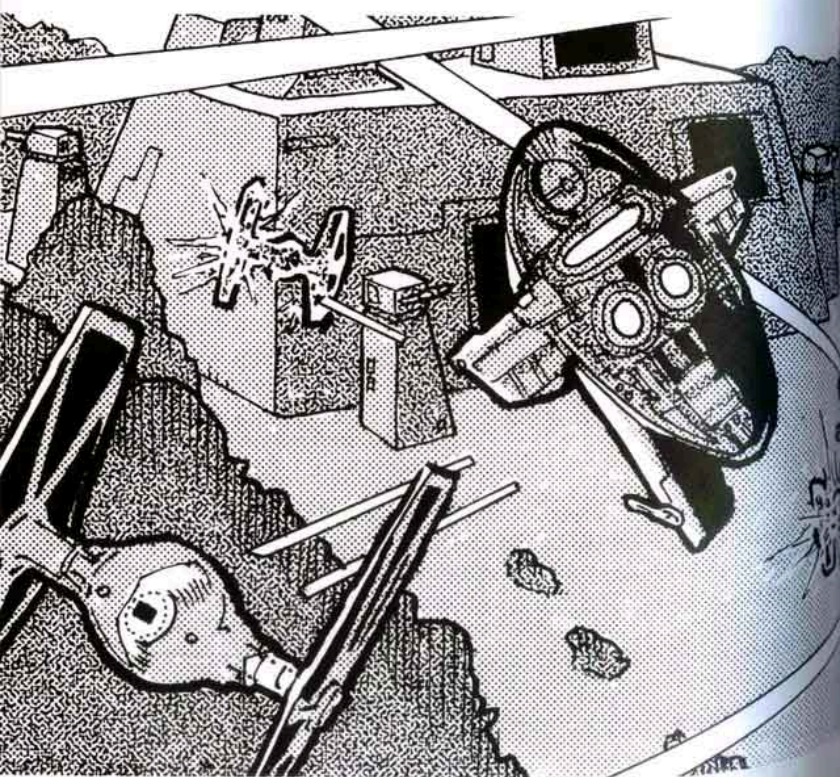
Xarran squeezed his gloved hand into a tight fist. "Fire at will! Blow him out of the sky!"

As *Slave I* circled for another pass, six heavy twin laser turrets

mounted around the building opened fire, followed by the thunderous roar of the three heavy twin turbolaser turrets from the upper level of the base. Unfortunately, the heavy weapons were slow to fire and even slower to track such a swift target.

Fett's ship executed an amazing series of maneuvers that allowed it to continue its strafing run while dancing around the green swarm of angry laser bolts. Twisting, turning and rolling, *Slave I* delivered a vicious counterattack capped by a full spread of proton torpedoes that punched a gaping hole in the base's deflectors. In return, Fett's ship took some minor damage, but easily eluded any critical hits.

Slave I executed a quick Segnor's Loop and moved into position for another assault.



"It's not working," Tyrix said, slamming a hand onto his console. "That ship's just too fast for our turrets to track. We're barely touching him and he's already knocked three quarters of our shield generators off-line." The damage control screen flashed the grim news. "Another run like that and he'll leave us defenseless!"

"No one is that good," Xarran thundered. The General was shaking with rage. "Launch the entire squadron. I want every TIE we have in the air now."

Nodding, Tyrix punched the intercom, calling for all pilots to report to their spacecraft. He turned to Xarran, "Should we sound the code alarm, sir?"

"No," Xarran said, his face flushing slightly. "I've served in the Imperial Army for most of my life and I will not be taunted into sounding full alert by one man, no matter how powerful he may appear to be. Besides, Fett will not breach the perimeter...the TIEs will see to that."

Tyrix paused a moment before responding—a sign of disapproval he would never dare to vocalize. "As you wish, sir."

Rivo shook his head. "Why won't you take the precautions? It won't hurt to—"

Xarran cut him off. "There isn't much good you can do up here, brother. Perhaps you should return to your quarters."

"But, I'm...fine." Rivo saw the look on Xarran's face and silently walked to the turbolift.



Slave I soared through the skies, taking potshots at the 40 TIE fighters giving chase. Fett hated to see such an unfair fight, but there was nothing he could do about it. His ship was faster, more maneuverable, and bristled with twice as much weaponry as all the

fighters put together. And unlike the TIEs, *Slave I* had shields. The Imperial fighters were hopelessly outmatched, even with the rather simplistic combat routines he had pre-programmed into the ship. The attacks on the garrison were typical Rebel strafing runs the Empire had so much trouble dealing with, while the evasive maneuvers against the TIEs were randomized according to sensor information. Fett avoided having *Slave I* be too aggressive with the fighters. Pre-programming was still no match for a live pilot.

All things considered, it was a good distraction, but would be over relatively soon. He was going to have to hurry.

Most of the stormtrooper patrols had cleared the catwalks—those that remained had their attention focused on the skies above.

Fett sprinted for the perimeter fence. When he closed half the distance he engaged his jet pack and soared into the air in a burst of flame. Elevating quickly, the hunter easily cleared the 10-meter-high fence, continued over the energy mine field between the fence and the base, and executed a perfect landing on the catwalk.

He checked his blaster rifle and quickly moved to the observation platform to his left. The first stormtrooper to step out caught a bolt in the helmet and went down. In mid-stride Fett sent a stun grenade arcing through the air and into the guardhouse. His faceplate tinted opaque as the flash-bang erupted, so the hunter didn't miss a beat when he dove inside the blast door on his stomach. Wild blaster bolts erupted overhead as Fett calmly picked off all five stormtroopers manning the tower.

He sealed the entrance behind him and calmly walked over to the computer terminal. Fett entered the encryption codes he had purchased from an unsavory Bothan and went to work. The first thing he pulled up was a three-dimensional schematic of the garrison base.



"Status?"

Tyrix glanced at the General and almost smiled. "We took heavy losses but the TIEs are routing him. Take a look."

The Commander stepped away from the tactical screen. Xarran studied the images for a few moments, watching as *Slave I* slowly

led the TIE fighters away from the base. "It's a feint."

"What?"

"Fett's not on that ship."

Tyrix was confused. "Then where is he?"

"Here." It pained the General to say it. "Inside the perimeter by now, I'd venture. Sound the code alarm—reference an intruder alert. Go to full battle stations and step up interior patrols." Xarran quietly walked back to his chair and dropped down as if the weight of an AT-AT was set upon his shoulders.



Fett stood at the command console of Sub-Level 3. Over a dozen stunned or dead technicians were scattered around the room. The hunter studied the illuminated panels which controlled the base's main power, back-up generators, tractor beams, and deflector shield generators. He went to work....



Tyrix nearly fell out of his chair. "Sir! We have him!"

"What?" The General was by his side in seconds.

"Someone's accessing the main control units on Sub-Level 3." He called up the data. "See? He's using a code from last month, and the computer flagged it."

"It has to be Fett. He's trying to shut us down." Xarran contemplated his response. "Send three squads down to...no, wait. Seal off that room immediately. We'll flood it with Chemtrox gas and that will be the last of our little bounty hunter."

Tyrix's voice lowered. "But what if it's not him...? And even if it is, he could have some technicians—"

Xarran pushed the Commander out of the way. His fingers flew over the console and a smile slowly dawned on his face. Fett was shutting down all systems and there was no time for moral debate. The race was on again and this time Xarran would win.



Fett whirled around as the heavy blast doors sealed and locked. He was effectively trapped. So, they finally discovered his trick and now knew where he was. It certainly took them long enough. Of course it was too late. Fett was about to cut the power.

He was so absorbed in his work that he almost missed it...luckily, his sound sensors picked up the recessed vents clicking open and the slow, steady hiss of gas being pumped into the room.

A quick scan revealed the substance to be Chemtrox—an extremely lethal agent. Fett had heard it delivered a particularly painful death. He didn't intend to find out firsthand if the rumors were true.

Fett activated his armor's enviro filter seal. It protected him from harmful or deadly atmosphere and there was a two-hour supply of air.

As the Chemtrox gas swirled around him Fett prepared to shut down the main computer.



"There..." Xarran wiped the sweat from his forehead and sat back in Tyrix's chair. "It's over. No one could have possibly survived that."

Everything went black. Every last bit of power in the entire garrison base. There was only darkness.

The Commander's voice rang out. "You were saying, sir?"

A blaster shot sent a crimson flash of light through the control room and Tyrix's body hit the floor. General Xarran activated a glow rod and hefted his blaster pistol. His eyes danced wildly in the soft light, then focused on the corpse of his Commander.

The terrified faces of the base command crew stared back at him as if he had suddenly transformed into a mynock. Xarran fired three bolts into the ceiling. "Everyone out. Now!"

The crew quickly obeyed, stumbling over themselves to reach the emergency stairs. The General entered his office and sat down in front of his console. There was one system that would not have been affected by the loss of main or back-up power. It ran off a special generator that only he knew about—well, he and Tyrix, but the Commander wouldn't be talking any time soon.

Xarran activated the panel and smiled as the base's self-destruct system lit up with crimson letters. The General lowered his head to accommodate the retinal scanner and began reciting the code to activate the countdown.



Fett moved through the darkened, deserted corridors of the base. Except for the steadfast stormtroopers, nearly everyone had fled the once mighty garrison. With his sound, motion, infrared, and targeting sensors all activated, picking off the ivory-armored opponents was ridiculously easy.

Of course, the one person who mattered was also present...somewhere in the bowels of the garrison.

Fett had paid a small fortune to have the unwitting fool tagged with one of his special microscopic subdermal trackers back on Inat Prime. It was a wise investment.

Jabba had not placed an open bounty on Rivo Xarran; rather, His Bloatness had offered the job solely to Fett...50,000 credits. Dead or alive.

Fett suspected the Hutt wanted to see just how good Fett really was. Jabba knew Rivo would run to his big brother for help and an entire Imperial garrison would stand between the hunter and his prey.

Fett didn't like the Hutt, but he paid well and on time. That was more than he could say for most. Besides, one day Jabba would get what was coming to him. After all, justice was a patient hunter.

Fett knew the value of that particular virtue very well, so he continued his careful ascent through the garrison's main tower. There was no need to rush. The end would come soon enough. And no matter how novel the hunt had been, the conclusion was always the same.